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ELECTRICAL SAFETY FACT SHEET

BACK-UP GENERATOR SAFETY

Many rely on backup electric generators for emergency power when the electricity goes out. If you are considering purchasing a backup generator, Safe Electricity wants you to know and take proper safety steps before operating an electric generator in your home or business.

“If installed and operated correctly, use of standby or portable electric generators poses little danger,” says Molly Hall, Executive Director of Safe Electricity, “But improper installation or use could be dangerous to you and threaten the lives of your family, friends, neighbors and electric utility crews trying to restore service.”

Consult and discuss your purchase options with a reliable vendor, your electric supplier and contractors. A qualified vendor or electric professional will know existing safety codes and the utility’s safety requirements, and can help you select the best equipment for your needs and situation.

Properly connecting the generator into the system is the next critical step for safe and effective use. A licensed professional should install a permanent, standby electric generator.

An electric generator wired directly into a building’s electrical system must have a transfer safety switch to prevent electricity from traveling back through the power lines, or “back feed.”

“Before you operate any standby or backup generator, make sure it has a transfer safety switch or that your power is cut off at the breaker box to prevent back feed,” warns Jasper County REMC. “Back feed creates danger for anyone near lines, particularly crews working to restore power.”

“Safety for the operators and users of a generating system in the home and utility crews cannot be over-emphasized,” says Hall. “A qualified electrician should be consulted to ensure proper installation and that electrical grounding requirement, circuit overload protections and local codes are met.”

Some homeowners choose smaller, portable generators to power essential electrical equipment during outages. Safe Electricity offers these tips for the safe operation and use of portable generators:

- Read and follow all manufacturer operating instructions.
- Make sure the generator is properly grounded.
- Never plug a portable electric generator into a wall outlet or connect directly to a home’s wiring. This can energize utility power lines and injure you or others working nearby. Electrical back feed also can damage the generator and home electrical equipment.
- Don’t overload the generator and plug in more appliances than the generator is rated to handle.
- Use shop-type electrical cords designed for heavier outdoor use to connect appliances. Many generators are equipped with twist-lock connects to reduce accidental disconnections due to vibrations.
- Always keep the generator outside in a dry, protected area, away from windows or air intakes where deadly exhaust fumes can enter living spaces.
- Turn off generator and allow cooling before refueling.
- Before shutting down a generator, turn off and unplug all appliances and equipment being powered by the generator.