



**Connecticut Department of Public Health
Food Protection Program
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Generator Use in a Food Establishment During a Power Outage

Many food service establishment operators may be considering the use of a portable electric generator when a power outage occurs. Operators should be aware that not all food service establishments would be able to operate safely in accordance with food safety regulations even with a generator. It is important to contact the local health department prior to reopening after a power outage either with or without a generator.

When considering an electrical generator to be used in emergencies, make certain that the generator has the capacity to operate critical pieces of equipment such as refrigerators and freezer units, pumps, safety lighting, hot water heaters, etc. Ensure that staff members are trained to operate the equipment safely.

Don't overload the generator:

- Determine the amount of power the establishment will need to operate the equipment that will be connected to the generator.
 - Light bulb wattage indicates the power needed for lighting.
 - Appliance and equipment labels indicate their power requirements.
- If the amount of power needed can't be determined, ask an electrician.
- Make sure the generator produces more power than will be drawn by the equipment connected to the generator, including the initial surge when it is turned on.
- If the equipment draws more power than the generator can produce, it may blow a fuse on the generator or damage the connected equipment.
- If the generator does not produce enough power to operate everything at once, stagger the use of the equipment.

Connect the Generator Correctly:

- A generator needs to have a special hookup installed. A licensed electrician should properly wire and connect generators. Do not connect the generator directly into the establishment's electrical system through a receptacle outlet. Before using a portable generator, the wiring must be disconnected from the power grid. Otherwise, power from the generator can go out over the utility lines, endangering the lives of workers making repairs.
- Always plug electrical appliances and equipment directly into the generator using the manufacturer's supplied cords or extension cords that are grounded (3 pronged).

- Inspect the cords to make sure they are fully intact and not damaged. Never use frayed or damaged extension cords. Make sure cords do not present a tripping hazard.
- Keep a generator dry; do not use it in the rain or in wet conditions. If needed, protect a generator with a canopy. Do not use electrical equipment that has been submerged in water.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning:

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an invisible, odorless gas that can be fatal. Incorrect generator use can lead to CO poisoning from the toxic engine exhaust, electric shock or electrocution and fire.

- Never use a portable generator in a basement, crawl space or other enclosed space even if the doors and windows are open or fans are running. Deadly levels of CO can build up and remain for hours after the generator has been turned off.
- Only use portable generators outside and as far away as possible but at least 20 feet from the establishment.
- If you start to feel sick, dizzy, or weak while using a generator, get outside to fresh air right away.
- Seek medical attention immediately if any staff member has symptoms of CO poisoning. Symptoms include headache, fatigue, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, or loss of consciousness.

Fire Hazards:

- Generators become hot while running and remain hot for long periods of time. Turn the generator off and let it cool before refueling. Gasoline spilled on hot engine parts could ignite.
- Gasoline and other generator fuels should be stored and transported in approved containers that are properly designed labeled, and vented.
- Keep fuel containers away from flame producing and heat generating devices.

Adapted from the 2006 US Federal Emergency Management Agency, "Important tips to ensure safety when using generators," a State of Washington DPH fact sheet entitled, "Generator Use During a Power Outage" and the CT DPH Fact Sheet, "CARBON MONOXIDE Hazards During Power Outages Safety Tips."