



An Extended Guide · No. 1359

Maintaining Your Automatic Transfer Switch

A little care, year after year

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

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! Read this first — this is licensed electrician's work

An automatic transfer switch is wired straight into your home's main electrical panel and works hand in hand with a standby generator. That makes installing one a licensed electrician's job from start to finish — almost always with a permit and an inspection — and never a do-it-yourself project. A big part of what the switch does is keep your generator's power from ever backfeeding onto the utility lines, which protects the crews working to bring your power back. Getting that right is exactly why the work belongs to a licensed pro. My job is to help you understand it, choose it, and live with it — not to open your panel. The hands-on maintenance that matters goes to a qualified pro too — your part is light, safe, and mostly a matter of keeping an eye out.

A little care, year after year

An automatic backup system asks very little of you — but 'very little' isn't 'nothing.' A bit of sensible care keeps it ready for the years of outages ahead. This guide covers what upkeep it needs, what's safely yours to do, and what belongs to a professional.

I'm Bill, and I help folks in Portage County keep their home tech healthy without turning it into a chore. The good news: the transfer switch itself needs almost nothing, and the generator's real maintenance is a pro's quick visit, not a job for you. Your part is light and pleasant.

We'll lay out a simple rhythm — what to glance at, what to keep clear, and when to have a pro visit — so your system stays as reliable in its tenth year as its first.

★ Want help setting up a care routine?

If you'd like a simple maintenance rhythm you can actually keep, I'm glad to help you set one up. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, your system will stay ready for years.

- ❑ The transfer switch itself needs very little — keep it clean and dry, and don't touch its wiring.
- ❑ The generator needs the real care: oil, filters, and a spark plug — a professional's job, per the manual.
- ❑ A weak or dead battery is the top cause of no-starts — have it checked and replaced on schedule.
- ❑ Keep the generator's area clear of snow, leaves, and critters, year round.
- ❑ Have it professionally serviced on schedule — commonly yearly, and by running hours.
- ❑ 'Automatic' means no effort in an outage — not 'never needs anything.'

✓ Light for you, real for the machine

Your maintenance is genuinely light — look, keep clear, and schedule a pro. But the machine does need that care, so don't mistake 'automatic' for 'ignore forever.'

The transfer switch itself needs very little

Let's start with the good news: the star of this whole category is nearly maintenance-free.

A transfer switch has no engine, no fuel, and few moving parts, so it asks almost nothing of you. Keep it clean and dry, make sure nothing's stacked against it or blocking it, and that's essentially the owner's side of switch care. If it's an outdoor unit, its enclosure keeps weather out — just make sure the cover stays closed and undamaged.

What you never do is open it up or touch its wiring. If a switch ever feels stiff, behaves oddly, or shows a warning, that's a call to your electrician, not a do-it-yourself fix. But day to day, the switch is the easy part — it mostly just waits, reliably.

✓ Clean, dry, and left alone

For the switch, 'maintenance' really means keep it clean and dry and leave its insides to the pros. It's built to wait quietly for years with little fuss.

The generator needs the real upkeep

The maintenance that matters is mostly the generator's — because it's an engine, and engines need tending.

Like any engine, a standby generator needs its oil changed, its air filter cleaned or replaced, and its spark plug checked from time to time — all following the manufacturer's manual for the intervals and the right parts. This is hands-on engine work, done by a qualified professional, not something you tackle yourself. Many folks set up a service plan so a pro simply shows up on schedule.

I won't quote you specific intervals or oil types — follow your manual, which is written for your exact unit. The principle is simple: an engine that's cared for on schedule stays reliable, and one that's neglected eventually isn't.

✓ A service plan takes it off your mind

Many owners set up a maintenance plan with their installer or a service company, so the oil changes and checks happen on schedule without you having to remember. It's a lovely way to keep it worry-free.

The battery — the quiet troublemaker

If there's one part that most often lets a standby generator down, it's the battery. It deserves special attention.

A standby generator uses a battery to start its engine — and a weak or dead battery is among the most common reasons a generator fails to start when called. Batteries wear out over a few years, and cold weather is especially hard on them. The regular exercise cycle helps keep it charged, but batteries still age and eventually need replacing.

Having the battery checked as part of regular service, and replaced on schedule before it fails, is one of the highest-value bits of maintenance there is. It's a small part with an outsized role in whether your backup works when you need it.

! Don't wait for the battery to fail

A battery that's replaced on schedule is cheap insurance; one that dies in an outage means no backup at all. Have it checked regularly and replaced before it's worn out — don't wait for a no-start.

Keeping the generator's area clear

This one is genuinely yours to do, and it matters more than it might seem.

- **Snow and ice:** keep the unit and its vents clear in winter so it can breathe and its exhaust can escape.
- **Leaves and debris:** clear away fallen leaves, grass clippings, and yard waste that pile up around it.
- **Plants and overgrowth:** keep shrubs and grass trimmed back so the unit has its required clearance.
- **Critters:** mice and insects sometimes nest in warm equipment — a pro checks for this, but keep an eye out.
- **Clutter:** never lean things against it or store items on or around it; it needs open air.

! Clear air is safe air

Keeping the area clear isn't just tidiness — a blocked or buried generator can't cool properly or vent its exhaust safely. This simple chore is real safety.

Professional service intervals

The hands-on care happens on a schedule — part by the calendar, part by how much the generator has run.

A common rhythm is a professional service visit about once a year, plus attention after a certain number of running hours — which matters more if your generator has carried you through long outages. Your manual spells out the intervals for your unit; I won't guess numbers that might not match yours. An hour meter on the generator makes tracking this easy.

At a service visit, a pro changes the oil and filters as due, checks the battery, spark plug, and connections, confirms the exercise cycle and controls, and looks the whole system over. It's the tune-up that keeps your backup dependable, and it's worth putting on the calendar.

✓ Track hours, not just years

If your generator runs a lot in a heavy-outage year, it may need service sooner than the calendar suggests. An hour meter — and a pro who tracks it — keeps you on the right schedule.

What you can safely check yourself

There's a small, safe set of things you can keep an eye on — no tools, no panels, no risk.

- ❑ Listen for the weekly self-test, and note if it ever stops happening.
- ❑ Glance at the indicator lights or display for a 'ready' status, not a warning.
- ❑ Keep the area clear of snow, leaves, plants, and clutter.
- ❑ Look (don't touch) for anything obviously amiss — leaks, damage, critters, a stuck cover.
- ❑ If on propane, keep an eye on the tank level so it never runs low.

✓ Look, don't tinker

Your safe checks are all 'look and listen,' never 'open and adjust.' If something you see or hear seems wrong, that's a call to a pro — which is exactly the right response.

What only a professional should do

Just as important as knowing your part is knowing where it ends.

Anything hands-on with the engine or the wiring is a professional's job: oil and filter changes, spark plug and battery service, adjusting controls, and of course anything touching the transfer switch's wiring or your panel. These involve fuel, high voltage, and precise settings — not territory for even a handy owner.

This isn't me being overly cautious; it's the same reason the install is a licensed job. The engine and the electrical connections are where mistakes get dangerous. Your role is to keep the area clear, watch and listen, and call in the pro on schedule and when something seems off.

! Engine and wiring: pros only

Changing oil on a standby generator isn't like on your lawn mower — it's part of a fueled, wired system best left to someone trained on it. Keep your hands to the safe, outside checks.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

Maintenance is the same idea everywhere, but a couple of practical details — fuel and access — differ between town and country.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, a natural-gas connection means no fuel tank to watch, so your fuel upkeep is essentially nothing. Access for a service tech is usually easy, and a nearby service company can pop by on schedule without much fuss.

- A natural-gas connection means no tank to monitor — one less thing to track.
- Easy access makes routine professional service quick and convenient.
- Keeping a compact unit's small area clear of leaves and snow is a light, quick chore.
- A local service company can keep to a yearly schedule easily.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, propane means keeping the tank filled and sized for long outages, and clearing snow, brush, and wildlife from around the unit is a bigger, more regular job. A rural property may see the generator run more hours, so watch service intervals by running time, not just the calendar.

- Keep the propane tank filled and coordinate deliveries so it never runs low.
- Clearing snow, tall grass, and nesting critters is a more regular rural task.
- More running hours in long outages can mean service is due sooner than the calendar says.
- A service tech may travel farther — schedule ahead so visits happen on time.

★ Let's build a care routine for your home

Town or country, gas or propane, I'll help you set up a maintenance rhythm that fits your property and that you'll actually keep. Call (330) 200-8042.

A simple maintenance calendar

It helps to picture the year, split between what's yours and what's the pro's.

Your light, regular tasks

Weekly-ish: notice the self-test ran. Monthly-ish: glance at the status lights and keep the area clear — more often in leaf season and winter. Anytime: watch a propane tank's level, and look (don't touch) for anything amiss.

The professional's scheduled visits

Commonly once a year, and by running hours after heavy use: oil and filter changes, battery and spark-plug checks, control and connection checks, and a full look-over. Follow your manual and let a pro keep to it.

✓ Put the pro visit on the calendar

The easiest way to never miss service is to schedule the next visit at the end of the last one, or set up a plan. A date on the calendar beats a good intention every time.

Keeping records, and the hour meter

A little record-keeping makes maintenance easier and protects your investment.

Keep a simple record of service visits — what was done and when — with your manuals and permit paperwork. Many generators have an hour meter that counts running time, like a car's odometer; it's the best guide to when hours-based service is due, and a pro will check it each visit.

Good records also help if you ever sell your home: a documented, well-maintained backup system is a genuine selling point, and proof it was cared for. It's the same reason to keep your install permit and inspection records safe.

✓ A little folder goes a long way

Keep a folder — paper or on your phone — with your manuals, warranty, permit, and service dates. It turns 'when did we last service it?' from a guess into a glance.

Fuel upkeep

Your fuel maintenance depends entirely on which fuel you have.

On natural gas, there's essentially nothing to do — the supply is endless and always there. On propane, your one real fuel job is keeping the tank adequately filled and sized so it carries you through a long outage, and coordinating deliveries so you're never caught low. A tank gauge and a standing delivery arrangement make this easy.

Either way, the generator itself handles using the fuel; you don't pour or mix anything as you would with a portable. Fuel upkeep for a standby system is about supply, not handling — which is one of its great conveniences.

✓ Never let the propane run low

An automatic system can't make fuel. If you're on propane, keeping the tank filled is the one fuel task that's truly on you — and the one that would otherwise cut a long outage short.

Signs it's time for service

Beyond the schedule, your system will often tell you when it wants attention — if you know the signs.

- **A warning light or message** on the control or in the app — the clearest signal.
- **A rough, struggling, or failed self-test** — a prompt to call before the next outage.
- **Slow or hard starting** during a test — often the battery waving a flag.
- **New noises, smells, or leaks** around the unit.
- **It's simply overdue** by the calendar or hours since its last service.

✓ The system often asks nicely first

Modern systems are good at flagging trouble early, with a light or an alert. Heed those calmly and promptly — our warning-signs guide helps you read them — and you'll rarely be caught off guard.

Service is professional work, too

Just as the install is licensed work, so is the hands-on maintenance.

The oil, filters, plug, battery, and any wiring or control work are handled by a qualified professional — your installer, a generator service company, or a licensed electrician for anything touching the switch or panel. Keeping service in professional hands protects your safety, your warranty, and the system's reliability.

! DIY 'maintenance' can void a warranty

Beyond the safety risk, do-it-yourself work on a standby generator can void its warranty. Stick to the safe outside checks, and let the pros handle the rest — it protects your coverage as well as you.

Safety, briefly

Maintenance keeps your system safe — and a couple of truths keep the maintenance itself safe.

! The generator still makes carbon monoxide

A standby generator burns fuel, so its exhaust still contains carbon monoxide — an invisible, odorless gas that is dangerous to breathe. Yours lives permanently outdoors, and your installer sets it the manufacturer's required distance from windows, doors, and vents so the exhaust drifts safely away from the house. You never have to place it yourself, but do keep that area clear, never box the unit in or enclose it to quiet it down, and keep tested carbon-monoxide alarms inside the house all the same.

Do your looking and area-clearing when the generator isn't running if you can, keep clear of it during its self-test, and never open panels or touch wiring. Leave the engine and electrical work to pros. Keep CO alarms inside tested, since the generator runs during every exercise and outage.

! Clearing the area is safe; opening it isn't

Sweeping snow and leaves from around the unit is exactly the kind of maintenance that's yours. Opening it up or touching its engine or wiring never is. Keep to the safe side of that line.

Common maintenance mistakes

A few avoidable missteps account for most preventable failures.

- **Assuming 'automatic' means 'no maintenance'** — then being surprised by a no-start.
- **Neglecting the battery** until it dies in an outage.
- **Letting the area get buried** in snow, leaves, or overgrowth.
- **Skipping scheduled professional service** to save a little.
- **Letting a propane tank run low** and cutting a long outage short.

! The battery is the classic neglect

Of all the maintenance misses, an old battery is the one I'd most warn against — it's the quiet reason many generators fail to start. Keep it checked and fresh.

Questions to ask about maintenance

These help you set up a care routine that keeps your system ready.

Q: What's the service schedule for my unit, and can I set up a plan?

Ask about yearly and hours-based intervals, and whether a maintenance plan can take it off your mind.

Q: How often should the battery be checked and replaced?

The battery is the top no-start cause — make sure it's on the service checklist and replaced before it fails.

Q: What can I safely do myself, and what should I never touch?

Get a clear line: keep the area clear and watch the lights; leave the engine and wiring to pros.

Q: Does maintenance affect my warranty?

Confirm what upkeep the warranty requires, and that professional service keeps your coverage intact.

✓ There's no silly question

A good service pro welcomes these and will help you set up a simple, reliable routine. Your system's longevity is worth the conversation.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about maintaining a backup system, answered plainly.

Q: Does an automatic system really need maintenance?

Yes — 'automatic' means no effort during an outage, not 'never needs anything.' The generator is an engine that needs oil, filters, and battery care on schedule, done by a pro.

Q: What's the most important part to maintain?

The battery — a weak or dead one is the top reason a standby generator fails to start. Have it checked regularly and replaced before it wears out.

Q: What can I do myself?

Keep the area clear of snow, leaves, and clutter; listen for the self-test; glance at the status lights; and, on propane, watch the tank level. Look and listen — never open or adjust.

Q: How often does it need professional service?

Commonly about once a year, plus attention after a number of running hours — follow your manual. Many owners set up a service plan so it happens automatically.

Q: Can I change the oil myself to save money?

Best not to — it's part of a fueled, wired system, and DIY work can be unsafe and can void the warranty. Leave the engine and wiring to a qualified pro.

★ Want a simple care routine?

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll help you set up a maintenance rhythm that keeps your system ready without becoming a chore.

What I do to help

Keeping your system healthy over the years is exactly the kind of ongoing help I love to provide.

- **What I help with:** setting up a simple care routine, reminding you of the safe owner checks, and lining up professional service.
- **What only a qualified pro does:** the oil, filters, battery, spark plug, and any wiring or control work.
- **What I never do:** the engine or electrical work myself — I keep you on track and call in the right pro.

★ Your friendly maintenance reminder

Between your pro's visits, I'm happy to be the friendly nudge that keeps your system cared for — and your first call when something seems off. Reach me at (330) 200-8042.

A simple maintenance checklist

Keep this handy — it's the whole of good ownership, split into yours and the pro's.

- ☐ Yours: keep the generator's area clear of snow, leaves, and clutter.
- ☐ Yours: listen for the weekly self-test and glance at the status lights.
- ☐ Yours: on propane, keep the tank filled and sized for a long outage.
- ☐ Pro's: yearly (and hours-based) service — oil, filters, plug, and checks.
- ☐ Pro's: battery checked regularly and replaced before it fails.
- ☐ Both: keep records, and call a pro at the first sign of trouble.

✓ Yours is light; the pro's is scheduled

That's the whole recipe: a little looking and clearing from you, a scheduled visit from a pro, and a call when something seems off. Keep to it and your backup stays ready for years.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made maintaining your automatic transfer switch and generator feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do the licensed electrical or gas work myself — for that I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

Your Care vs. the Pro's

Light for you, scheduled for the professional

	You (safe checks)	The professional
The switch	Keep clean & dry	Any wiring work
The generator	Keep area clear	Oil, filters, plug
The battery	Note hard starts	Check & replace
Fuel	Watch propane level	Confirm connections

Look and listen -- never open or adjust. Leave that to a pro.

The Battery: the Quiet Troublemaker

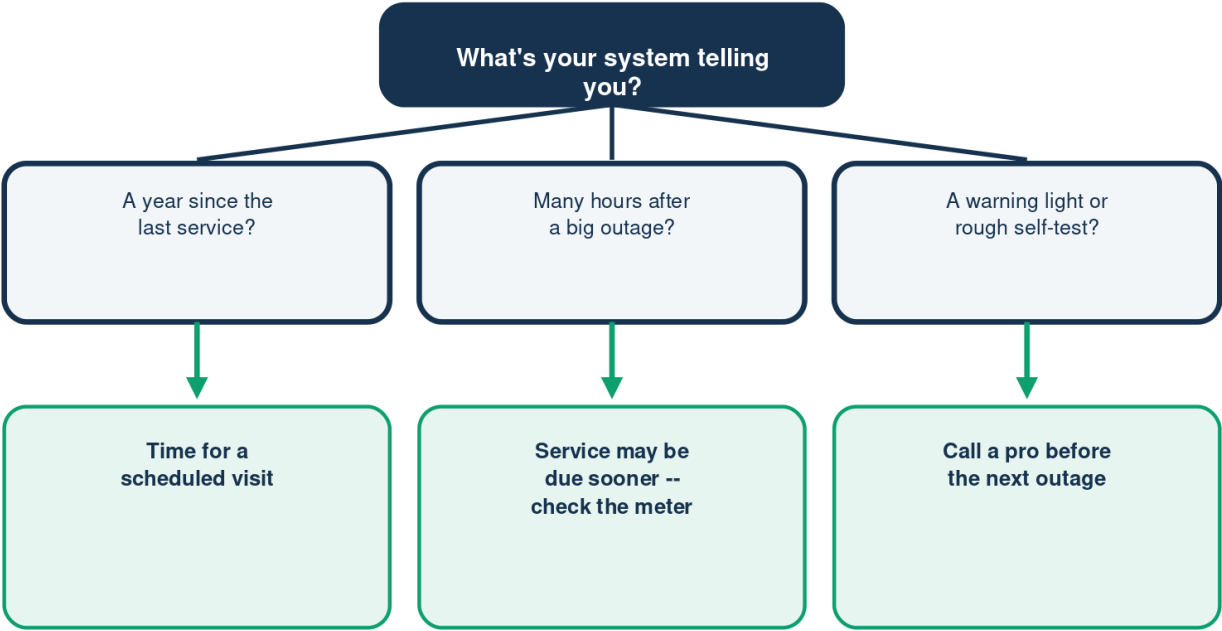
The top cause of a no-start



A fresh battery is cheap insurance against a dead one in a storm.

Is It Time for Service?

By the calendar, the hours, or the signs



A weak battery and skipped service are the top preventable failures.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

A Simple Maintenance Rhythm

What happens, and how often

	How often	What
Weekly-ish	Notice the	self-test ran
Monthly-ish	Clear the area,	check the lights
Yearly + hours	Professional	service visit
As needed	Battery replace,	call on any sign

Put the pro visit on the calendar -- a date beats a good intention.



Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.
You just have to remember you can call.
Friendly, in-home tech help -- I come to you.

BILL'S PROMISE

If you are not 100% happy with a visit, I will
make it right -- or refund it. No awkwardness,
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— Bill

Prefer help without a visit?

Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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