



An Extended Guide · No. 1663

New-Generator Setup and First-Start Safety

Out of the box to first
safe start, step by step

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! Read this first — carbon monoxide is the real danger

A running generator's exhaust contains carbon monoxide — an invisible, odorless gas that can kill in minutes. Never run a generator indoors, in a garage, in a shed, or on a porch, not even with the door open and a fan going. Run it outside only, well away from the house — the safety agencies say at least 20 feet — with the exhaust pointed away from every window, door, and vent. Put battery-backup carbon-monoxide alarms on each floor and outside the bedrooms. If an alarm sounds, or anyone feels dizzy, sick, or sleepy, get everyone into fresh air first and ask questions later. Even the very first start is a running engine full of CO — do it outdoors, 20-plus feet away, exhaust pointed away.

From the box to a safe first start

A brand-new generator is exciting, and there's a real temptation to yank the cord the moment it's out of the carton. A few calm minutes of setup first will save you a ruined engine, a messy start, and — most important — keep that very first run safe.

I'm Bill, and in 30-plus years of helping folks with the gear in their homes, I've learned that the first start sets the tone for the life of the machine. Do it right and you've got a reliable friend for years. Rush it and you can do real harm in the first ten minutes.

This guide walks you from the box to a safe first start, step by step: what to read, what to add, where to do it, and the order to do it in. It's a checklist you'll use once per generator and then rarely need again — so let's take it slow and get it right together.

★ First-start jitters? That's a great first visit

Unboxing and first-starting a new generator together is one of my favorite calls — calm, unhurried, and you learn the machine as we go. If you'd like a hand, call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

The 60-second version

If you read nothing else before your first start, read this page.

- ❑ Read the manual first — it overrides every rule of thumb in this guide or anywhere else.
- ❑ Most units ship without oil. Add the correct oil to the right level before the first start — running it dry ruins the engine.
- ❑ Plan an early break-in oil change after the first few running hours, per the manual, because break-in leaves fine metal particles behind.
- ❑ First fuel fill: fresh fuel with stabilizer, don't overfill, wipe spills, and never fuel a hot or running engine.
- ❑ Do the first start outdoors, on a dry level spot, at least 20 feet from the house, exhaust pointed away — the first run makes CO too.
- ❑ Start with nothing plugged in, let it warm up, then add loads one at a time. Set up and test your CO alarms before you rely on it.

! The first start is still a running engine

It's easy to think a quick test run in the garage is harmless because it's brand new and 'just for a minute.' It isn't. From the very first pull, it makes carbon monoxide — so the first start is outdoors, well away, every time.

Read the manual first — it's the real boss

Every generator is a little different, and the maker's manual knows your exact model in a way no general guide ever can.

I'll give you a sensible, safe sequence in this guide, but wherever your manual says something different — a specific oil, a fill level, a starting step, a break-in schedule — the manual wins. It was written for the machine in front of you, and following it is also how you keep the warranty intact.

Give it a real read before you touch anything. Find the sections on oil, fuel, starting, and the first break-in period, and keep the manual somewhere you can grab it. If the print is small or the wording is fussy, that's exactly the sort of thing I'm glad to sit and go through with you.

✓ Keep the manual with the machine

Tuck the manual in a bag on the generator's handle or in the same spot you store it. A manual you can find in ten seconds is a manual you'll actually use.

Most units ship without oil — add it first

This is the step that catches the most people, and getting it wrong can wreck a brand-new engine in minutes.

Most portable generators ship dry — with no oil in the engine at all. If you start one without adding oil first, you can ruin it almost immediately, and no warranty loves that story. So before anything else, add the oil your manual specifies, to the level it specifies, and check it on a level surface.

Use the exact oil type and amount from the manual — not a guess, and not whatever's on the shelf. Fill to the right level, no more: too much oil is its own problem. Then make checking the oil before every use a lifelong habit, because a generator that's low on oil is a generator on borrowed time.

! Never start it dry

Adding oil is not optional and not a 'later' job — it comes before the very first pull. Starting a dry engine, even once, even briefly, can do damage you can't undo. When in doubt, check the oil.

Plan for the early break-in oil change

A new engine sheds a little of itself as it settles in, and the first oil change clears that away. It's normal, and it matters.

When a fresh engine first runs, its moving parts wear against each other just slightly as they seat — and that break-in leaves very fine metal particles suspended in the oil. That's why most makers call for an early oil change after just the first few running hours, well before the normal schedule. Changing it then carries those particles out before they can do harm.

Your manual gives the exact timing and oil for your model — follow it rather than any general number. After that first break-in change, you settle into the regular routine: check the oil before every use, and change it on the schedule the manual sets.

✓ Mark the break-in change on your calendar

It's easy to forget a change that happens after only a few hours of use. Jot it down after your first start so the break-in oil change doesn't slip past — our maintenance-for-safety guide covers the ongoing routine.

The first fuel fill, done safely

Fresh fuel, handled carefully, gets you off to a clean start and sets a safe habit for every fill after.

Fuel the generator with fresh fuel and add a fuel stabilizer from the start — fuel goes stale over the months an outage-only machine sits idle, and stabilizer keeps it usable and your engine happier. Fill carefully, and treat fueling as the deliberate, no-shortcuts step it is.

- Use fresh fuel and add stabilizer, especially since it may sit unused between outages.
- Don't overfill — leave the room the manual calls for, since fuel expands.
- Wipe up any spills before starting, and let spilled fuel dry.
- Never add fuel to a hot or running engine — shut it off and let it cool first, or you risk a fire.

! Never fuel a hot or running engine

Gasoline on a hot engine or near the exhaust can ignite. Always stop the generator and give it time to cool before you refuel — no matter how much you'd rather not interrupt the power.

Where to do the first start

A brand-new generator makes carbon monoxide from the very first pull, so where you start it matters just as much as it will for every run after.

Do the first start outdoors, on a dry, level spot, at least 20 feet from the house, with the exhaust pointed away from every window, door, and vent. It's tempting to do a quick 'just to see if it runs' test in the garage or by the back door — but that first run is a full carbon-monoxide source like any other. Our guide on the 20-foot rule walks through safe placement in depth.

A level spot also helps you check the oil accurately and lets the engine run the way it's meant to. Pick the spot in daylight, pace off the distance, and make it the same safe spot you'll use every time — so the safe habit starts with run number one.

! The first run is not a special case

New doesn't mean safe-indoors. A generator's first minutes make carbon monoxide exactly like its thousandth. Outdoors, 20-plus feet out, exhaust pointed away — from the very first start.

The safe first-start sequence

Here's the calm, in-order sequence for that first run. Your manual may name the controls a little differently — follow it.

- ❑ Nothing plugged in yet — start it with no load at all.
- ❑ Fuel valve or fuel switch on, if your unit has one.
- ❑ Choke set to the cold-start position (a cold engine needs the choke).
- ❑ Run or engine switch on, then start it — pull the recoil cord smoothly, or use the electric start if it has one.
- ❑ Once it catches, let the choke open gradually as it warms, and let the engine run and warm up before you ask anything of it.
- ❑ Only then add loads one at a time — never everything at once.

✓ Let it warm before you lean on it

A cold engine, like a cold morning, wants a minute to wake up. Give it time to warm and settle into a steady rhythm before you plug the first thing in, and it'll reward you with an easier, cleaner run.

If it has a CO shutoff, confirm it's active

Many newer generators include a built-in carbon-monoxide shutoff. If yours does, take a moment to make sure it's switched on and working as the maker intends.

A CO shutoff is a sensor that watches the air around the generator and shuts the engine off on its own if carbon monoxide climbs to a dangerous level nearby. Look in the manual for whether your model has one, whether it needs to be enabled, and how to confirm it's active. Makers who build this feature to the safety standard known as PGMA G300 or UL 2201 will say so.

One thing to be very clear about: the shutoff is a backstop for the unexpected, not a reason to run any closer to the house. It exists for the rare moment something goes wrong despite good placement — not as permission to skip the 20-foot rule on your first start or any after.

! A backstop, never a substitute

Confirm the CO shutoff is on and treat it as a welcome last line of defense. Then place the generator exactly as if it weren't there — outdoors, well away, exhaust pointed away, alarms inside. The sensor catches mistakes; it doesn't excuse them.

Set up and test your CO alarms first

Before you rely on a new generator for a real outage, make sure the alarms that protect the house are in place and working.

A generator's first real job usually comes during a storm, at night, with the house sealed up — exactly when you want your carbon-monoxide alarms ready. Get them set up and tested during the calm of a first start, not in the scramble of an outage. Our guide on the 20-foot rule covers alarm placement alongside safe generator placement.

- Use battery or battery-backup CO alarms — plug-in-only alarms are dark during the outage you need them for.
- Put one on every level of the home and outside every sleeping area.
- Press the test button on each one, and note the replacement date printed on the unit.
- Do this before you count on the generator, so the protection is ready when the real outage comes.

! Alarms are part of the setup, not an extra

A new generator isn't truly ready until the alarms that guard the house are tested and in place. Treat setting them up as part of first-start day, right alongside the oil and the fuel.

Register the warranty, keep the manual and receipt

Ten minutes of paperwork on day one can save you real trouble later — and it's easy to do while everything is fresh.

Register the warranty per the maker's instructions, and keep the manual and your receipt together somewhere safe. If a part ever fails or you need to prove when you bought it, you'll be glad it's all in one place. This is also when to record the serial number for your own records.

- Register the warranty by the method and any deadline the maker gives.
- Keep the manual and receipt together with your home papers.
- Record the model and serial number for your records — handy for warranty and, if it's ever stolen, for the police.
- Note the maintenance schedule from the manual so the break-in change and routine service don't slip.

✓ Do the paperwork before the manual walks off

New-machine paperwork has a way of vanishing into a drawer. Handle the registration and file the manual and receipt on the same day you first start it, while it's all still on the table.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

The first start looks a little different in a tight neighborhood than it does out in the country — but the safety steps are exactly the same in both.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, your first start likely happens in a driveway or a small yard, close to the neighbors. That's fine, as long as you keep the safe distance and mind whose windows the exhaust points toward.

- Find a spot that's still 20-plus feet from the house, even on a smaller lot — a side yard or driveway may be your clear line.
- Point the exhaust away from the neighbor's windows and doors as carefully as your own — close homes share air.
- A first run makes noise; a calm daytime test is neighborly and lets you learn the machine without pressure.
- If you'll later connect it to the panel, that's a licensed electrician's job — plan it separately from the first start.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, you've usually got more room for a safe first start — but outages run longer and help is farther, so do that first start well before you desperately need the machine.

- Use the space you have — there's rarely a reason to start it close to the house when you have room to spare.
- Do the first start on a calm day, not during the first storm — you want any surprises to happen when it doesn't matter.
- If you'll run a well pump or other 240-volt loads, plan that hookup with a licensed electrician, separately from the first start.
- Longer rural outages mean you'll lean on this machine hard — the break-in change and tested alarms are worth doing right the first time.

★ Let's do your first start together

Town or country, I'm glad to walk through the whole first start with you — oil, fuel, a safe spot, and the starting sequence, all at your pace. Call (330) 200-8042.

Your first-start checklist

Here's the whole first start on one page, in order. Work down it once and you're set.

- ☐ Manual read, especially the oil, fuel, starting, and break-in sections.
- ☐ Correct oil added to the right level, checked on a level surface.
- ☐ Fresh fuel with stabilizer added, no overfill, spills wiped up.
- ☐ A safe spot chosen — outdoors, dry, level, 20-plus feet out, exhaust pointed away.
- ☐ CO alarms set up and tested, and the CO shutoff confirmed on if the unit has one.
- ☐ Started with nothing plugged in, warmed up, then loads added one at a time — warranty registered and manual filed.

✓ One pass, top to bottom

Don't jump around. Work straight down this list the first time, and each step sets up the next — oil before fuel, fuel before starting, warm-up before loads.

Adding your loads, one at a time

Once it's warm and steady, you can start putting it to work — gently, and in the right order.

Add what you're powering one item at a time rather than all at once. Big motor-driven things — a fridge, a freezer, a pump — draw a surge of power the moment they kick on, several times what they use while running, so give the engine a beat to settle after each one before adding the next. If it bogs down or an alarm on the unit trips, you're asking for too much at once.

- Let the engine warm and steady before the first load.
- Add the largest motor-driven items first, then smaller things, pausing between each.
- Read the appliance nameplates for their draw rather than guessing — never assume a wattage.
- If it strains or a breaker trips, shed a load — you're past what it can carry.

✓ Our sizing and cords guides go deeper

How much a generator can carry, and the right cords to carry it, each have their own guide. Here, the point is simply the habit: warm up first, then add loads one at a time.

Connecting to the panel is a separate, licensed job

Getting the generator running is your job. Wiring it into the house is an electrician's — and the two shouldn't be tangled together.

Your first start is about the machine itself. If you also want the generator to power hardwired things through your electrical panel, that connection — a transfer switch or an interlock, and an inlet box with a heavy matched cord — is a licensed electrician's job, usually with a permit. It's not part of a first start, and it's never a do-it-yourself shortcut.

For the first start, you're simply running the generator on its own and, at most, plugging things straight into its outlets with outdoor-rated cords. When you're ready for the panel connection, our guides on the transfer-switch-versus-interlock choice and the inlet box and generator cord walk through it — and I'll line up a licensed electrician for the work.

★ I'll line up the licensed pro for the wiring

I don't do the licensed electrical work myself, but I'll help you plan it and connect you with a trustworthy local electrician for the panel hookup. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

Settling in after the first few hours

The first start is the beginning of a routine, not a one-time event. A little attention early keeps the machine healthy for years.

After those first few running hours, do the break-in oil change your manual calls for — it clears out the fine metal particles from the engine settling in. From there, a simple rhythm keeps it safe and reliable, and none of it is hard once you've done it once.

- Do the break-in oil change on the manual's timing, then change oil on the regular schedule.
- Check the oil before every single use — it's the cheapest insurance there is.
- Keep fuel fresh with stabilizer, and follow the manual for storage between outages.
- Test the CO alarms and the CO shutoff periodically, and keep the exhaust ports clear.

✓ The maintenance guide picks up here

This page is the handoff. For the full routine — oil, filters, spark plug, fuel, and safety checks — our maintenance-for-safety guide carries it forward from your first few hours onward.

Myths people believe — and the truth

A few first-start beliefs sound reasonable and can cost you an engine or worse. Here's the honest version of each.

Myth	Fact
'It's new, so I can test it in the garage.'	New or old, a running engine makes carbon monoxide. First start outdoors, 20-plus feet out.
'It comes with oil ready to go.'	Most ship dry. Add the correct oil to the right level before the very first start.
'One oil change schedule is enough.'	There's an early break-in change first, after a few hours, then the regular schedule.
'I can top off fuel while it runs.'	Never fuel a hot or running engine — it can ignite. Stop and let it cool.
'A CO shutoff means I can skip the distance.'	It's a backstop, not a pass. Outdoors, 20-plus feet, exhaust away — every start.

! The costly mistakes hide in the first ten minutes

Every myth above feels harmless in the moment, which is why they bite. When a shortcut tempts you on first-start day, trust the manual and this guide, not the rumor.

Questions worth asking

A few plain questions that clear up most of what folks wonder before a first start.

Q: Does my new generator already have oil in it?

Usually not — most ship dry. Check the manual and add the correct oil to the right level before the first start. Starting it dry can ruin the engine.

Q: Why do I need an oil change so soon after the first one?

Break-in leaves fine metal particles in the oil as the engine settles. An early change after the first few running hours — per the manual — carries them out before they do harm.

Q: Can I just do a quick first-start test in the garage?

No. Even a brand-new generator makes carbon monoxide from the first pull. Do the first start outdoors, at least 20 feet from the house, exhaust pointed away.

Q: Do I plug everything in once it starts?

No — start it with nothing plugged in, let it warm up, then add loads one at a time so you don't overwhelm it.

★ There's no silly question here

First-start questions are some of my favorite to answer — there's no such thing as a silly one. Reach me at (330) 200-8042 any time you'd like to talk it through.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from folks working through this guide, answered plainly.

Q: What's the one thing I should do before anything else?

Read the manual and add oil. Most units ship dry, and the manual tells you the exact oil, level, and starting steps for your model — it overrides every rule of thumb.

Q: Is the first start really a carbon-monoxide risk?

Yes. A new engine makes carbon monoxide exactly like an old one. The first start goes outdoors, at least 20 feet from the house, with the exhaust pointed away and alarms ready inside.

Q: What should I add to the first tank of fuel?

Fresh fuel plus a fuel stabilizer, since an outage-only generator sits idle for months. Don't overfill, wipe any spills, and never fuel a hot or running engine.

Q: Can I connect it to my house wiring after the first start?

Not yourself. A panel connection — a transfer switch or interlock with an inlet box — is a licensed electrician's job, usually with a permit, and separate from the first start.

! Keep this guide with the manual

Tuck this alongside your generator's manual and receipt. Come back to it for the break-in oil change, and any time you set up a new machine.

Bringing it all together

A good first start is really just doing a handful of simple things in the right order — and never skipping the safety ones.

Read the manual, add the right oil, fill with fresh stabilized fuel, and start it outdoors and well away with nothing plugged in — then warm it up, add loads one at a time, plan the break-in oil change, and get your alarms tested. Do that, and your generator's whole life starts on the right foot.

For what comes next, our guide on the 20-foot rule anchors the carbon-monoxide thinking, our maintenance-for-safety guide carries the oil and service routine forward, and our guides on the transfer-switch-versus-interlock choice and the inlet box and generator cord cover the panel hookup — which is always a licensed electrician's job.

★ Let's get your new generator started right

On a visit I'll walk you through the whole first start — oil, fuel, a safe spot, the starting sequence, and your alarms — calmly and at your pace. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

If you remember only one thing

Out of everything on first-start day, one idea keeps you safe and keeps the engine whole.

Read the manual, add oil before the first pull, and do that first start outdoors and well away from the house — because a new engine makes carbon monoxide and runs dry just as easily as any other. Everything else here supports those three: read it, fill it, and start it safely outside.

! Say it back to yourself

Manual first. Oil before the first start. Outdoors, 20-plus feet, exhaust away — even on run number one. Nothing plugged in until it's warm. That's the safe first start, start to finish.

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 setting up and first-starting a new 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.

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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

Before Your First Start

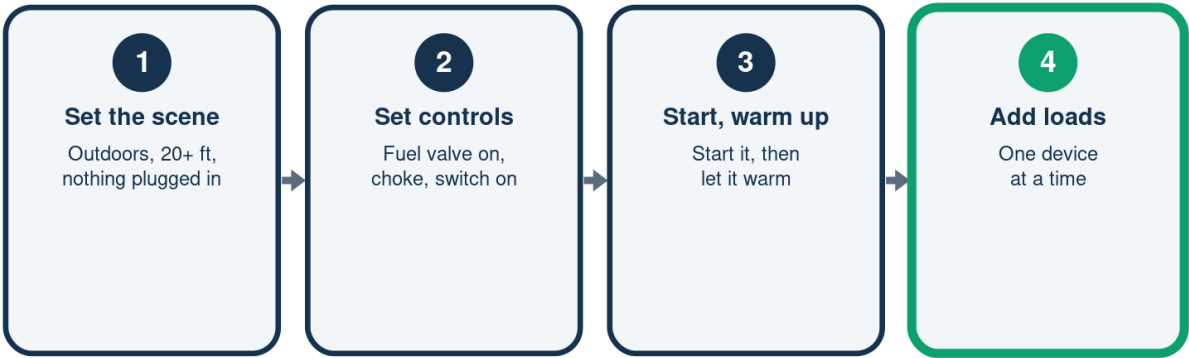
Five things to do before you pull the cord

	Step	Why
Manual	Read it first	It overrides all
Oil	Add the right oil	Dry ruins it
Fuel	Fresh + stabilizer	Stale fuel clogs
Place	Outdoors, 20+ ft	First run makes CO
Alarms	Set up and test	Warn you inside

The manual is the real boss -- where it differs from any rule of thumb, follow the manual.

First Safe Start

The calm sequence to a safe first run



Nothing plugged in at start -- add loads one at a time only after it warms up.

Ships With / Ships Without

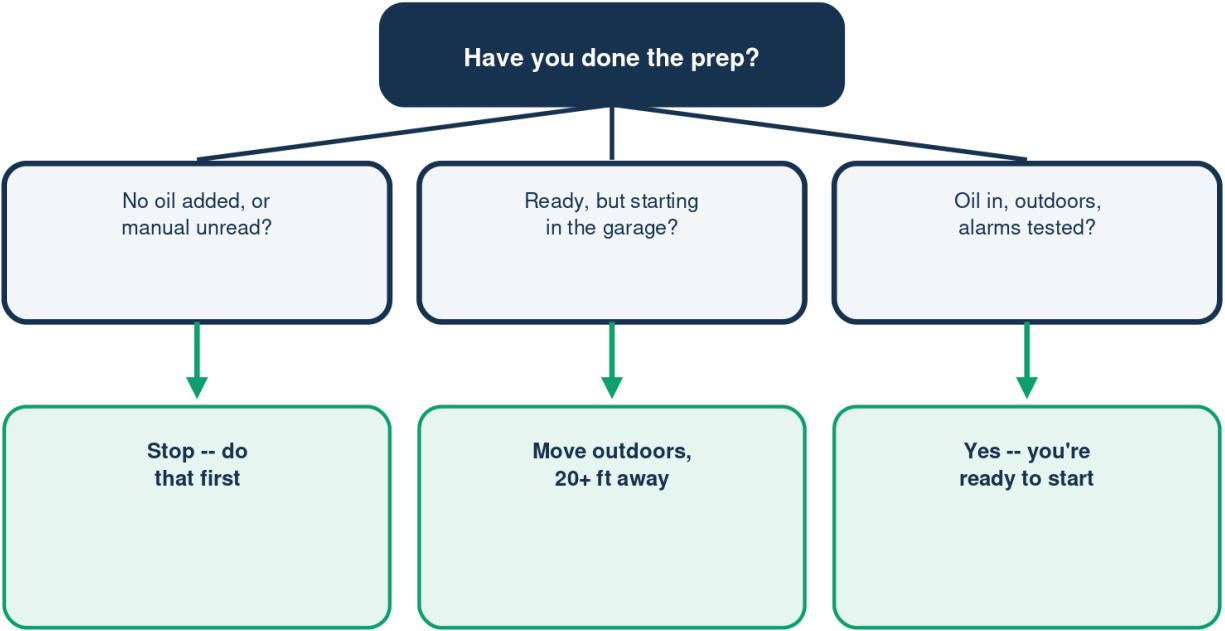
What's in the box, and what you add

	Usually included	Usually NOT included
Engine	The assembled unit	Oil -- add it first
Fuel	An empty tank	Fuel + stabilizer
Hookup	The outlets on it	Heavy cords, inlet
Papers	Manual and card	A filed warranty

Most units ship dry -- adding oil and fuel is on you before the first start.

Ready for First Start?

A quick gut-check before you pull the cord



The very first run makes CO. Outdoors only, 20+ ft, exhaust pointed away.

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



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

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