



An Extended Guide · No. 1226

Interlock Kits, Explained

A simpler, affordable panel hookup

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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. An interlock kit changes how power reaches your panel, not where the generator itself has to sit — it still runs outside, far from the house, every single time.

A simpler, affordable way to power your panel

An interlock kit is the budget-friendly way to connect a generator to your whole panel — a small mechanical plate, a dedicated breaker, and one heavy cord standing in for a small forest of extension cords. This guide is the deep dive on exactly how it works and how you'll use it.

I'm Bill. If you've read our overview guide on connecting a generator to your house, you already know an interlock kit is one of the three honest hookups — the one that does the same safety job as a transfer switch for less, by asking a little more of you at the panel. Here, we go deeper: what that little sliding plate actually does, and what your day looks like when the power goes out.

None of this is a do-it-yourself project. Installing an interlock kit is a licensed electrician's job, start to finish. My part is helping you decide it's the right fit, planning which circuits matter, lining up a trustworthy electrician, and making sure everything's set up and tested before you ever need it in the dark.

★ Thinking about an interlock kit?

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and tell me what's on your must-run list. I'll help you figure out whether an interlock kit or a transfer switch fits your home and your budget better, then line up the electrician.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you already understand the heart of how an interlock kit works.

- ❑ An interlock kit is a small mechanical plate at your breaker panel that lets a generator safely feed your whole panel.
- ❑ It mechanically stops your main breaker and a dedicated generator breaker from ever being switched on together — that's the entire safety idea.
- ❑ Power arrives through one heavy cord, from the generator to a power inlet mounted outside your house.
- ❑ Unlike a transfer switch, there's no dedicated row of labeled switches — you choose circuits by working your main panel's own breakers yourself.
- ❑ Installing one is a licensed electrician's job, almost always with a permit.
- ❑ It's the more affordable of the two panel hookups, in exchange for a little more hands-on effort each time you use it.

✓ Cheaper doesn't mean less safe

An interlock kit does the exact same core safety job as a transfer switch — keeping generator and utility power from ever meeting. The difference is convenience, not safety.

What an interlock kit actually is

A small metal or plastic piece — often called a sliding plate or tab — installed right at your breaker panel.

It doesn't add a second panel or new switches to learn. Instead, it changes how your existing main panel behaves. Normally your main breaker can be switched on any time you like. With the interlock installed, you can only switch on the main breaker or a new, dedicated generator breaker — never both at once.

That new generator breaker is where your one heavy cord eventually connects, through an outdoor power inlet. Everything else about your panel stays exactly as it was.

✓ It sits quietly most of the year

Between outages, your panel works exactly like it always has. The interlock hardware just sits there, ready, until the day you actually need the generator breaker.

How the sliding plate keeps you safe

Here's the mechanical trick, and it's worth understanding rather than just trusting.

The plate physically covers part of the panel so that switching on the generator breaker requires sliding it into a position that blocks access to the main breaker's switch, and vice versa. You cannot physically force both to the 'on' position at the same time — the hardware itself won't allow it.

That's what prevents backfeeding. If the main breaker and the generator breaker could both be on together, generator power could flow backward into the utility lines outside — the exact danger our overview guide on connecting a generator describes with a 'suicide cord.' A properly installed interlock kit makes that mistake physically impossible, not just against the rules.

! Mechanical, not just procedural

This is a hardware safeguard, not a habit you have to remember correctly every time. That said, never force the plate, pry it, or try to defeat it — doing so removes the very protection it exists to provide.

What your panel needs

Not every panel can accept an interlock kit exactly as-is, which is why this starts with an electrician's evaluation, not a guess.

Your electrician checks for a few things: an interlock kit made to fit your panel's brand and layout, an open slot in the right position for a dedicated generator breaker, and enough room for a breaker properly sized to your generator's outlet.

If your panel isn't a match as it stands, there are sometimes workarounds, and in rare cases a panel upgrade. Either way, it's worth knowing before you fall in love with a specific plan.

★ Bring your panel's information

A clear photo of your panel, inside and out, helps an electrician quote the job quickly and helps me understand what you're working with too. Text it to me at (330) 200-8042.

The power inlet and the one heavy cord

Just like a transfer switch, an interlock kit keeps the physical connection simple.

Your electrician mounts a weatherproof power inlet on the outside of your house, wired to the new generator breaker inside. During an outage, one heavy cord — often carrying 240-volt power — runs from the generator to that inlet. No juggling several cords through a window or door.

✓ One cord, once

This is the same everyday convenience a transfer switch offers — one connection, made once, instead of managing several individual cords in the weather.

Interlock kit vs. transfer switch, briefly

Both are safe. Both need a licensed electrician. The difference is convenience, and usually cost.

An interlock kit adds a sliding plate to your existing main panel, typically for less than a transfer switch, but you manage the individual circuit breakers yourself each time. A transfer switch gives you a dedicated sub-panel of labeled switches — flip one per circuit, and you're never hunting through your main panel.

If a more affordable, hands-on approach sounds fine to you, you're in the right guide already. If labeled, dedicated switches sound worth the difference, our transfer-switch guide is the deep dive worth reading next.

★ Not sure which fits?

Our overview guide on connecting a generator lays the two side by side. Or just call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and describe your home — I'll give you my honest read.

Managing your own breakers

This is the real trade-off with an interlock kit, and it's worth understanding clearly before you choose it.

With an interlock kit, there's no dedicated row of labeled switches. Once the generator breaker is on, you choose which circuits get power by flipping the individual breakers in your own main panel — the same breakers you already have, just used a little differently.

That's actually a kind of flexibility: you can choose differently each outage depending on what matters that day. It does mean a clear plan matters more, since there's no built-in label to guide you the way a transfer switch provides.

✓ Label your panel in advance

Take a permanent marker or a label maker to your panel now, in good light, at your own pace — not during a storm. Big, clear labels on the breakers you'll actually use make all the difference later.

Why this is still a licensed electrician's job

An interlock kit is simpler hardware than a transfer switch, but it's every bit as much panel work.

A licensed electrician evaluates your panel, adds the dedicated generator breaker, installs the plate and the outdoor inlet, and in most areas pulls a permit so an inspector confirms the work meets your local electrical code. That inspection confirms the interlock was installed correctly — which matters, since it's the mechanical piece doing the safety work.

For what it costs, I won't guess a number — every home, panel, and electrician's rates differ too much for that to be honest. Get a quote from a licensed electrician rather than trusting a figure from the internet.

! Simple hardware, not a simple job

Don't let the interlock kit's modest size fool you into thinking it's a do-it-yourself project. Adding a breaker and wiring an outdoor inlet is still panel work, and it's still dangerous done wrong.

What installation day looks like

Knowing roughly what to expect makes the whole process feel a lot less like a mystery.

- ❑ The electrician evaluates your panel and confirms an interlock kit fits it.
- ❑ A dedicated generator breaker is added to the panel.
- ❑ The interlock plate is installed over the main and generator breakers.
- ❑ The outdoor power inlet is mounted and wired in.
- ❑ The permit and any required inspection are scheduled or completed.
- ❑ The electrician tests the setup with a generator connected before calling the job done.

★ I like to be part of that last step

Whenever I can, I join for testing day so I learn your specific panel alongside you — which breakers to use and in what order. Then I can walk you through it again anytime you'd like a refresher.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

Whether an interlock kit is the right fit for you, versus a transfer switch, often comes down to budget and comfort managing breakers yourself — in both town and country.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town, a lighter must-run list — the fridge, some lights, the furnace — is easy to manage by hand, and an interlock kit is a genuinely popular choice for keeping costs down without giving up whole-panel flexibility.

- A handful of circuits is easy to track even without dedicated labels — a simple written list taped by the panel does the job.
- The savings versus a transfer switch are often worth it for a shorter, lighter must-run list.
- Check with your town or homeowners' association before any panel work — a permit is the norm, not the exception.
- Our overview guide on connecting a generator can help you weigh cost against convenience.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out on a well, an interlock kit can still work well, but it asks more discipline: a well pump's demanding breaker has to be part of your manual routine every single time, without fail.

- Label the well pump's breaker clearly and put it first on your written order — no power to the pump means no water at all, for drinking, cooking, flushing, or the animals.
- Longer rural outages mean you'll be working those breakers by hand more often — some households decide the extra convenience of a transfer switch is worth it here.
- A rural must-run list often includes several breakers at once — pump, furnace, fridge, sump pump — so a clear, written plan taped inside the panel door matters.
- Our sizing guide covers how the pump's surge shapes both the generator and the breaker your electrician chooses.

★ Weighing an interlock kit against a transfer switch?

Tell me your must-run list and whether you're on a well, and I'll help you decide honestly which is the better fit for your home and your budget. Call (330) 200-8042.

Before the storm: get ready

An interlock kit rewards a little planning, since you're the one running the show at the panel.

- ❑ Decide your breaker order in advance — which circuits come on first, second, and so on.
- ❑ Label every breaker you'll actually use, in big, clear print.
- ❑ Tape a written copy of the steps inside or near the panel door.
- ❑ Keep the heavy cord coiled and easy to reach, not buried behind storage.
- ❑ Do a practice run in daylight, before you actually need it, so the steps feel familiar.

✓ Practice beats memory

You don't need to memorize your breaker order — you need it written down somewhere you'll actually find it in the dark. A practice run once a season is worth more than trying to recall it during a storm.

Step by step: switching to generator power

The order matters. Follow it the same way every time, and it becomes second nature.

- ❑ Set the generator up outside, at least 20 feet from the house, exhaust pointed away from windows and doors.
- ❑ Start the generator with nothing connected and let it settle for a minute.
- ❑ Plug the heavy cord into the generator, then into the power inlet.
- ❑ Turn off the main breaker, then slide the interlock plate and switch the generator breaker on.
- ❑ Turn on your chosen circuit breakers one at a time, staying within what your generator can handle.

! Never force the plate

If the plate or a breaker resists, stop and check your steps rather than pushing through. The interlock is built to prevent unsafe combinations — resistance is often it doing its job, not a flaw to work around.

Step by step: switching back to utility power

When the lights out front flicker back on, reverse the process calmly — there's no rush.

- ❑ Turn off the circuit breakers you switched on, one at a time.
- ❑ Switch the generator breaker off, then slide the interlock plate back.
- ❑ Turn the main breaker back on.
- ❑ Let the generator run a minute unloaded, then shut it off and unplug the cord.
- ❑ Let it cool fully before refueling or storing it.

✓ A good moment for a quick check

While things are quiet again, jot down how long you ran, note any hiccups, and check the oil. A minute now saves a surprise next time.

Sizing it to your generator and your panel

The generator breaker your electrician installs is matched to your generator's outlet — but staying within its limit each time is up to you.

Unlike a transfer switch, which only lets you turn on the circuits it was specifically wired for, an interlock kit trusts you to not exceed what the generator can deliver as you flip breakers on. That makes our sizing guide's running-watts-plus-surge math worth doing ahead of time, not worked out breaker by breaker during an actual outage.

Keep your written breaker order realistic — if the math says the furnace and the well pump together are close to your generator's limit, plan to run them one at a time rather than both at once.

✓ When in doubt, add one breaker at a time

Turning on circuits one at a time, and watching how the generator responds, is the simplest way to avoid asking for more than it can give.

Common mistakes with an interlock kit

A handful of avoidable slip-ups account for most of the frustration I hear about.

- **Forgetting the interlock only governs the main-vs-generator breaker**, not how many circuit breakers you switch on — that self-discipline is still on you.
- **Skipping the written breaker order** and trying to remember it during an actual outage.
- **Letting the outdoor inlet get blocked** by snow, leaves, or overgrown landscaping.
- **Skipping the permit or inspection** to save time, and never confirming the interlock was installed correctly.
- **Never practicing** until the night it's actually needed, under stress, in the dark.

! Don't skip the test

An interlock kit you've never actually used with the generator running is an unknown, not a safety net. Test it before you need it.

Safety reminders specific to this setup

An interlock kit removes the backfeed danger by design — but a few habits still matter.

! The rules that don't change

The generator still runs outside, at least 20 feet away, exhaust pointed away from windows and doors — a clean electrical hookup doesn't change the carbon monoxide danger at all. Keep carbon-monoxide alarms tested and in place, keep the cord and inlet dry, and never force, pry, or bypass the interlock plate.

If anything about the setup ever feels different — the plate sticking, a burning smell, a breaker that won't reset — stop using it and call your electrician or me before the next outage, not during one.

Living with it, season to season

An interlock kit mostly waits. A little attention between outages keeps it ready.

Keep the outdoor inlet's cover free of leaves, snow, and spiderwebs, and check that it still closes snugly. Exercise the generator itself now and then under some load, and keep its fuel fresh — our fuel-storage guide covers that part in detail.

Every so often, check that your panel labels are still legible and that the plate still slides freely. If it ever feels stiff or behaves unexpectedly, that's a call to your electrician, not a do-it-yourself fix.

✓ An annual practice run

Once a year, in daylight, run through the full switch-over and switch-back with the whole household watching. It keeps everyone — not just you — comfortable with the steps.

What I do, and what I leave to the electrician

Worth repeating plainly, since it matters.

- **What I help with:** deciding if an interlock kit fits, building your must-run list and breaker order, lining up a licensed electrician I trust, and walking through the setup with you afterward.
- **What only a licensed electrician can do:** evaluate and open your panel, add and wire the generator breaker, install the interlock plate and the outdoor inlet, and pull the permit.
- **What I never do:** panel work or 240-volt wiring myself — that's not my license, and your safety deserves the real thing.

★ Call before, not just after

The best time to call me is while you're still deciding, not after something's already installed and confusing. Reach me at (330) 200-8042.

Questions to ask your electrician

These get you to an interlock kit you understand and trust, not just one that's installed.

Q: Is my panel compatible with an interlock kit, or will it need extra work?

Worth asking before you fall in love with a plan. Some panels need extra parts, and a few need more significant work.

Q: What size generator breaker and inlet do I need?

Bring your generator's information so the breaker, inlet, and cord all agree with each other.

Q: Will I need a permit and an inspection, and how long does that take?

Ask about the timeline in your area so you're not caught mid-project during an actual outage.

Q: Can you show me exactly how to use it before you leave?

Always ask for a hands-on walk-through of the breaker order, not just a verbal explanation. Doing it once yourself, with the electrician there, is worth ten reads of an instruction sheet.

✓ There's no silly question

A good electrician expects these questions and welcomes them. If one seems bothered by a plain question, that's worth noting.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about interlock kits, answered plainly.

Q: Is an interlock kit as safe as a transfer switch?

Yes — both prevent generator and utility power from ever meeting, which is the core safety job. A transfer switch adds labeled, dedicated switches on top of that same safety idea.

Q: Can I switch on more circuits than my generator can handle?

Physically, yes — the interlock doesn't limit that part, which is why sizing and a written plan matter more here than with a transfer switch. Add circuits one at a time and watch how the generator responds.

Q: Can I install an interlock kit myself if I'm pretty handy?

I'd strongly advise against it. Panel work done wrong can create exactly the backfeed danger this guide describes, and most areas require a licensed electrician and a permit for good reason.

Q: Can I upgrade to a transfer switch later?

Often, yes, though it's typically treated as a new installation rather than a simple swap. Ask an electrician about your specific panel if that's a road you might want to go down someday.

★ Ready to talk it through?

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 with your must-run list, and let's figure out whether an interlock kit is the right next step for your home.

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 adding an interlock kit 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.

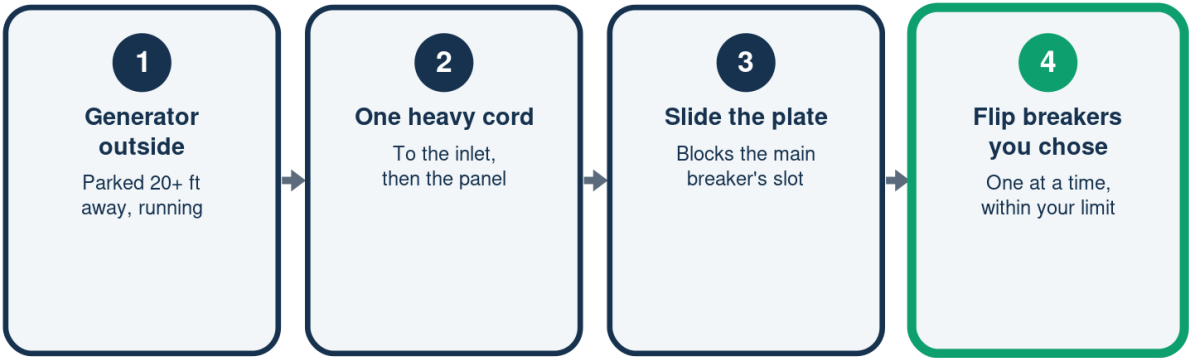
When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, 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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How an Interlock Kit Works

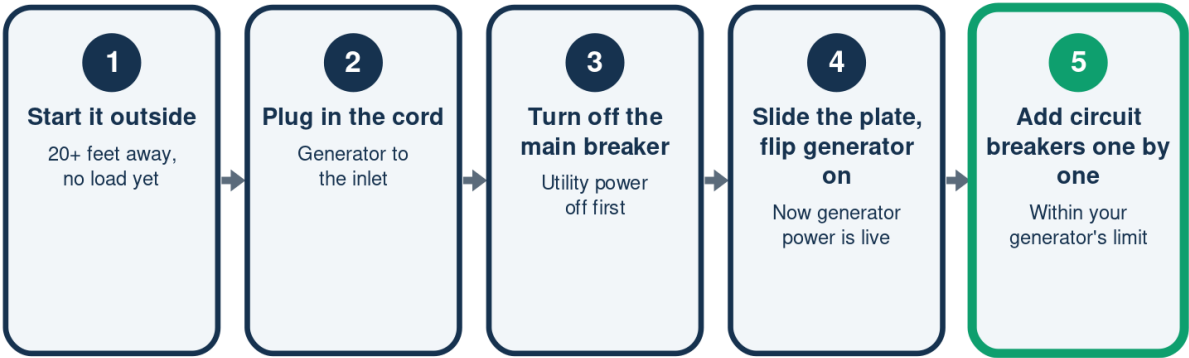
From the generator to the breakers you choose



The plate makes it physically impossible to run both breakers at once.

Switching to Generator Power

The same order, every single time



Practice this in daylight before you ever need it in the dark.

Interlock Kit vs. Transfer Switch vs. Cords

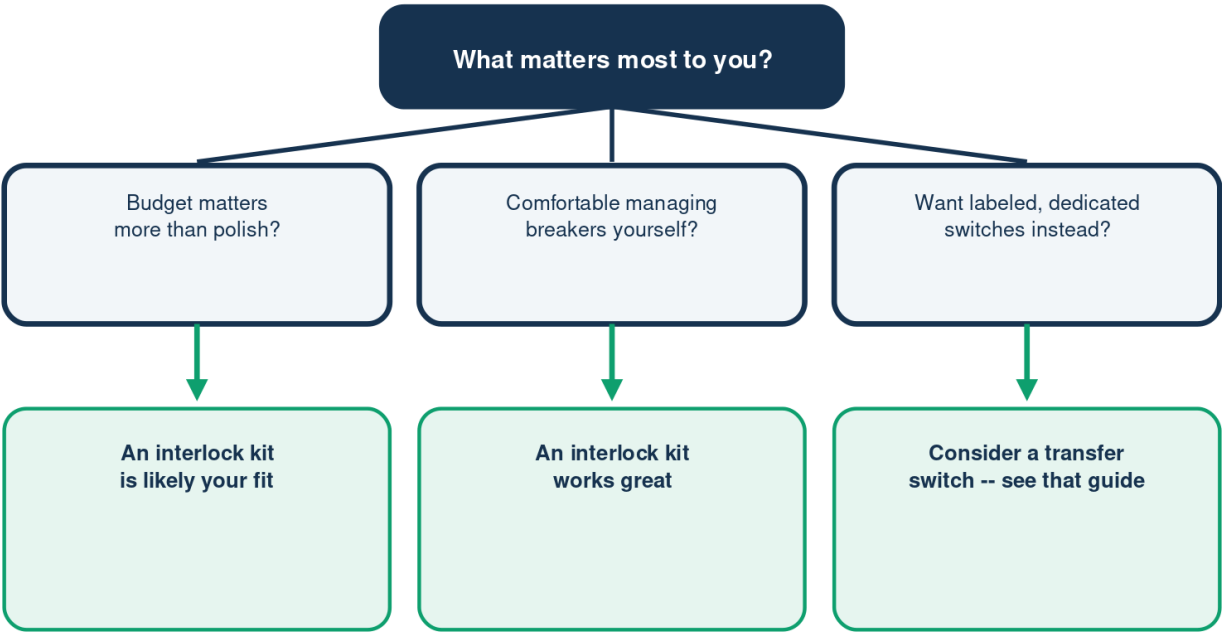
Three honest hookups, three different feels

	How it works	Good to know
Interlock kit	Sliding plate on main panel	You manage breakers
Transfer switch	Dedicated sub-panel	Flip one switch per circuit
Extension cords	No panel work at all	Can't reach hardwired loads

All three are safe when used correctly -- this is about fit, not safety.

Is an Interlock Kit Right for You?

What matters most to you?



Both are safe and both need a licensed electrician -- this is about fit, not safety.
Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.



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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.

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