



An Extended Guide · No. 1385

Common Interlock Kit Mistakes (and How to Avoid Them)

Learn from others'
mistakes, not your own

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! Read this first — panel work is a licensed electrician's job

A generator interlock kit is installed inside your home's electrical panel, and panel work is among the most dangerous jobs in any house. The power inside a panel can injure or kill even with the lights off, and a wiring mistake can start a fire or push deadly voltage back onto the lines outside, where a utility crew may be working. Adding an interlock — the sliding plate, the generator breaker, and the inlet it connects to — is a licensed electrician's job, almost always with a permit and an inspection. It is never a do-it-yourself project, and it is never something I do myself. This guide is here to help you understand, choose, and safely use an interlock — not to wire one. And please, never try to shortcut all this by backfeeding a generator through a wall or dryer outlet with a double-ended cord; that shortcut kills people, and an interlock kit is the safe, legal way to do the very thing it tempts you to do. The most dangerous mistakes here all involve the panel or backfeeding — which is exactly why the wiring is a licensed electrician's job, with a permit, and never a do-it-yourself project.

Learn from others' mistakes, not your own

After helping many folks with backup power, I've seen the same handful of interlock mistakes come up again and again. The good news is that every one of them is easy to avoid once you know about it. This guide gathers them, with the simple fix for each.

I'm Bill. Nobody sets out to make these mistakes — they happen from not knowing, or from a well-meaning shortcut on a stressful night. So think of this as a friendly heads-up from someone who's seen how each one plays out, not a scolding. A few minutes here can save you danger, money, and a lot of frustration.

Most of these mistakes are merely inconvenient. A few can genuinely hurt someone, and I'll flag those clearly, so you know exactly where to be most careful.

★ Want to sidestep these?

I'm glad to look over your setup or your plan and help you steer clear of every one of these. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

The mistakes, on one page

If you remember only these, you'll avoid the worst of them.

- ❑ Never DIY the install or backfeed — both are dangerous and illegal; use a licensed electrician with a permit.
- ❑ Never skip the permit and inspection.
- ❑ Always turn the MAIN off first, and never force the plate.
- ❑ Don't overload — bring circuits up one at a time, biggest first.
- ❑ Never run the generator near the house or in a garage — outdoors only, far away, because of carbon monoxide.
- ❑ Keep dry hands and a dry inlet, post big-print steps, practice, and keep the cord and inlet cover in good shape.

✓ Most are easy to avoid

Almost every mistake here has a simple fix, and knowing them ahead of time is most of the battle. Two or three are the ones to take most seriously.

Mistake: trying to install it yourself

The plate looks simple, and that tempts people — but this one can hurt you.

An interlock looks like just a bracket and a slide, so folks sometimes figure they can mount it themselves and save a little. But installing one means working inside your electrical panel, where the power can injure or kill even with the lights off, and a wiring mistake can start a fire. The fix is simple: an interlock is a licensed electrician's job, almost always with a permit and inspection. It's never a do-it-yourself project, and it's never something I do myself.

! Simple-looking, but it's panel work

The plate is simple; the wiring behind it is not. Adding an interlock is panel work — a licensed electrician, every time. Our questions-to-ask guide helps you hire well.

Mistake: the deadly backfeeding shortcut

This is the most dangerous mistake of all, so it comes early and in plain words.

Backfeeding means feeding a generator into the house through a wall or dryer outlet with a cord that has plugs on both ends. It can push power back onto the utility lines and electrocute a lineworker trying to restore your power, and it can start a fire when the utility comes back. It is deadly, and it is illegal. The whole reason an interlock exists is to do the very thing backfeeding tries to do — power your house from a generator — but safely and legally.

! Never, ever backfeed

There is always a safe, legal way, and the interlock is it. Please never take the backfeeding shortcut — our dangers-of-backfeeding guide tells the full story of why.

Mistake: skipping the permit and inspection

A tempting shortcut that costs far more than it saves.

Skipping the permit means no independent check that the work was done safely, and it can come back to bite you — it can complicate an insurance claim and make selling your home harder down the road. The fix: insist your electrician pulls the permit and arranges the inspection, and keep the paperwork with your home records. If someone offers to skip it to save a few dollars, that's a red flag, not a favor.

! A false savings

The little saved by skipping a permit is dwarfed by the risk to your safety, your insurance, and your home's resale. Our permits-and-inspection guide explains why it's worth it.

Mistake: skipping the main, or forcing the plate

This one is about the order of operations — and it's easy to get right.

The interlock only works if you follow the sequence: turn the MAIN breaker fully off first, then slide the plate, then turn the generator breaker on. If you forget the main, the plate is designed to refuse to move — that's the safety working, not a malfunction. The mistake is trying to force a plate that resists. Forcing it can damage the interlock or defeat its safety. The fix is to stop, confirm the main is truly off, and let the plate slide the easy way.

! Resistance is protection

A plate that won't slide is usually telling you the main isn't fully off. Never force it — check the main first. Our using-during-an-outage guide has the full sequence.

Mistake: turning on too much at once

The most common day-to-day mistake, and an easy one to fix.

With an interlock you can reach any circuit in the house, which is wonderful — but it means you can also ask for more than your generator can give. Flipping on too much at once trips breakers, bogs the engine, and dims your lights. The fix is a simple habit: bring circuits up one at a time, biggest first, and cycle loads rather than running everything together. Our load-management guide covers the whole routine, but the one-at-a-time rule prevents most overloads on its own.

✓ One at a time, biggest first

This single habit prevents most overloads. Turn things on one by one, starting with the biggest surging load, and stay within your generator's capacity.

Mistake: wet hands or a wet inlet

Outages and storms go together, so this one deserves real care.

Plugging the cord into the inlet with wet hands, in the rain, or into an inlet that's wet inside mixes water and real electrical power — a genuine shock hazard. The fix: dry your hands, shield the connection from the weather as best you can, and make sure the inlet is dry inside before you connect. If the inlet has standing water or damage, don't use it until it's sorted out. This is one of the mistakes that can actually hurt you, so treat it seriously.

! Dry hands, dry inlet

Water and electricity don't mix. Connect with dry hands to a dry inlet, out of the rain as much as you can — never force a connection into a wet or damaged inlet.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

Some mistakes are more common in town, others out in the country — worth knowing which ones apply most to you.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town, the common slip-ups are overloading a modest setup by turning on too much at once, connecting a wet inlet in a storm, and never practicing the steps because outages feel rare.

- Don't let rare outages lull you into skipping a practice run.
- Overloading is easy if you forget to bring loads up one at a time.
- Keep the inlet dry and connect with dry hands, even in a hurry.
- Post big-print steps by the panel so anyone can follow them.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country on a well, the big extra ones are asking the generator to start the well pump alongside everything else and overloading it, and a weather-exposed inlet that's been let go — plus the same deadly ones, backfeeding and unsafe generator placement, that apply everywhere.

- Bring the well pump up on its own — its start-up surge can overload the generator if too much else is running.
- Check the more weather-exposed rural inlet often, and never connect to a wet one.
- Never backfeed the well pump — the interlock is the safe, legal way to power it.
- Run the generator far from the house, even where there's room to get lazy about placement.

★ Not sure which mistakes apply to you?

Tell me about your home and whether you're on city water or a well, and I'll help you focus on the mistakes that matter most for you. Call (330) 200-8042.

Mistake: running the generator too close, or in a garage

This is the other mistake that can be deadly, so treat it with the same seriousness as backfeeding.

! 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. The dangerous mistake is running a generator too close to the house, or in a garage or shed — even with the door open and a fan going. It runs outdoors only, well away from the house, exhaust pointed away from every window, door, and vent, with tested carbon-monoxide alarms inside, every single time.

A clean interlock hookup can make people feel the danger is all handled — but the generator outside still makes carbon monoxide, and that hasn't changed. The fix never changes either: outdoors only, well away, exhaust pointed away, alarms working inside.

Mistake: no big-print steps, and never practicing

Learning the sequence for the first time in a dark, stressful moment is asking for trouble.

If your first real run-through is during an actual outage, you're far more likely to fumble, force something, or overload the generator. Two easy fixes head this off. First, keep a big-print copy of your operating steps taped right by the panel, so nobody has to remember the order. Second, do a daylight practice run, with the household, before storm season — it makes the real thing feel routine, and it's even a little fun.

✓ Post it and practice it

A big-print step sheet by the panel and one daylight practice run turn a stressful sequence into calm muscle memory. Our using-during-an-outage guide has steps you can post.

Mistake: letting the cord or inlet cover go

Small neglect outdoors turns into a real hazard over time.

The cord and the inlet live out in the weather, and folks forget them between outages. A cord that's cracked, cut, or frayed, or an inlet whose cover won't seal and lets moisture in, is a genuine danger the day you finally need it. The fix is a seasonal glance: look the cord over end to end and retire it if it's damaged, and check that the inlet cover and gasket are intact and it's dry inside. Our maintenance and inlet-box-and-cord guides cover the details.

! Retire a damaged cord

Don't tape a cracked cord or ignore a failing inlet cover. Replace or repair them — these outdoor parts carry real power in wet weather.

Mistake: assuming the interlock handles everything

The interlock does one job beautifully — but only one.

The interlock's job is to make sure your generator power and the utility's power can never meet. That's the electrical safety, and it handles it perfectly. What it does not do is manage how much you run at once, and it does nothing about carbon monoxide from the generator outside. The mistake is relaxing on those two because the hookup feels safe. The fix: keep managing your load by hand, and keep the generator far outside with alarms on. The interlock covers the crossover; you cover the rest.

✓ It's a safe gate, not a babysitter

The plate keeps the two power sources apart — that's its whole job. Overload and carbon monoxide are still yours to manage.

Mistake: hiring the wrong installer

The safety of the whole setup rides on who does the panel work.

Grabbing the cheapest bid without checking a license, skipping references, or going with someone who wants to dodge the permit can leave you with an unsafe install. The fix: hire a licensed, insured, experienced electrician; get written quotes from a few; check references; and treat pressure or permit-dodging as a reason to walk away. Our questions-to-ask and cost-and-quotes guides give you the whole vetting checklist.

! Cheapest isn't safest

The lowest bid can hide inexperience, a missing permit, or cut corners. Hire on license, experience, and trust — not on price alone.

Mistake: being the only one who knows how

If only you can run it, what happens when you're away or unwell?

Many households have just one person who knows the interlock sequence. If that person is traveling, ill, or asleep when an outage hits, everyone's stuck. The fix: teach a spouse, an adult child, or a caregiver the basic sequence and the one-at-a-time load habit, and practice together in daylight. With big-print steps posted by the panel, this is genuinely achievable — but only if you've shown someone. Don't let all the know-how live with one person.

★ I'll teach the whole household

I'm glad to walk your whole family through the sequence so anyone can handle an outage calmly. Call (330) 200-8042.

Which ones can truly hurt you

Most of these mistakes cost comfort or money. A few can cost someone their safety — keep those front of mind.

The genuinely dangerous mistakes are the backfeeding shortcut (or DIY panel work), running the generator too close to the house, and connecting with wet hands or into a wet inlet. Those can hurt or kill, and they're non-negotiable. The rest — overloading, faded labels, skipping a practice run, a neglected cord — are worth avoiding too, but they cost you comfort and equipment, not lives. Get the dangerous few right, and you've handled what matters most.

! The few that matter most

Never backfeed or DIY the panel, never run the generator near the house, and never connect wet. Those three protect people — everything else protects comfort.

How to avoid all of them

The whole list, boiled down to a handful of gentle habits.

- ❑ Use a licensed electrician and a permit — never DIY the panel or backfeed.
- ❑ Follow the sequence: main off first, slide the plate gently, never force it.
- ❑ Bring loads up one at a time, biggest first, within the generator's capacity.
- ❑ Run the generator outdoors only, far from the house, with CO alarms on inside.
- ❑ Post big-print steps, practice in daylight, and keep the cord and inlet in good shape.

✓ Good habits beat good luck

None of these habits are hard. Together, they turn backup power from a gamble into a sure thing.

A gentle word before we go on

None of this is meant to make you nervous — quite the opposite.

Every one of these mistakes is common precisely because they're easy to make when you don't know better or you're rushing on a hard night. Now you do know better, and that's most of the protection right there. You don't have to be an expert or memorize a thing — you just have to use a licensed pro for the wiring, follow your posted steps, keep the generator far outside, and call someone when a check turns up something odd. That's a setup you can trust, and a worry you can set down.

★ No shame, just help

If you're unsure about any of this, that's normal and fine. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and we'll sort it out together, at your pace.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about avoiding interlock mistakes.

Q: What's the single most dangerous mistake?

Backfeeding — forcing generator power through a wall or dryer outlet — and DIY panel work. Both can kill and are illegal. Always use a licensed electrician with a permit, and never backfeed. The interlock is the safe, legal way to do the same job.

Q: Why won't the interlock plate slide?

Almost always because the main breaker isn't fully off — the plate is designed to refuse to move until it is. That's the safety working. Never force it; confirm the main is truly off and it'll slide the easy way.

Q: What's the most common everyday mistake?

Overloading the generator by turning on too much at once. The fix is simple: bring circuits up one at a time, biggest first, and cycle loads rather than running everything together.

Q: Is it safe to plug in during the rain?

Take real care. Connect with dry hands to a dry inlet, shielded from the weather as much as you can, and never into an inlet that's wet inside or damaged. Water and electrical power are a genuine shock hazard.

★ Let's mistake-proof your setup

Call or text (330) 200-8042 and I'll help you avoid every one of these, start to finish.

How I help you avoid the pitfalls

Steering folks clear of these mistakes is a lot of what I do.

I'll help you plan things right, line up a licensed electrician who does it by the book with a permit, post big-print steps and make clear labels, teach the whole household the sequence and the one-at-a-time habit, and set up a simple seasonal check so the cord and inlet never go neglected. If you already have a setup, I'll look it over for any of these pitfalls and help you fix them. The goal is a backup setup that's safe, dependable, and free of the frustrations these mistakes cause.

★ A friendly second look

Whether you're planning fresh or already set up, I'm glad to help you avoid or fix these. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

The short version to carry with you

If the list blurs, hold onto these.

- ❑ Never DIY the panel or backfeed, and never run the generator near the house — those are the deadly ones.
- ❑ Turn the main off first and never force the plate; bring loads up one at a time.
- ❑ Connect with dry hands to a dry inlet, and keep the cord and inlet cover in good shape.
- ❑ Use a licensed electrician with a permit, post big-print steps, and practice in daylight.

✓ Keep this guide handy

This one makes a good final check — read it before you install, and again before each storm season.

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 avoiding common interlock kit mistakes 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

Each Mistake, and the Fix

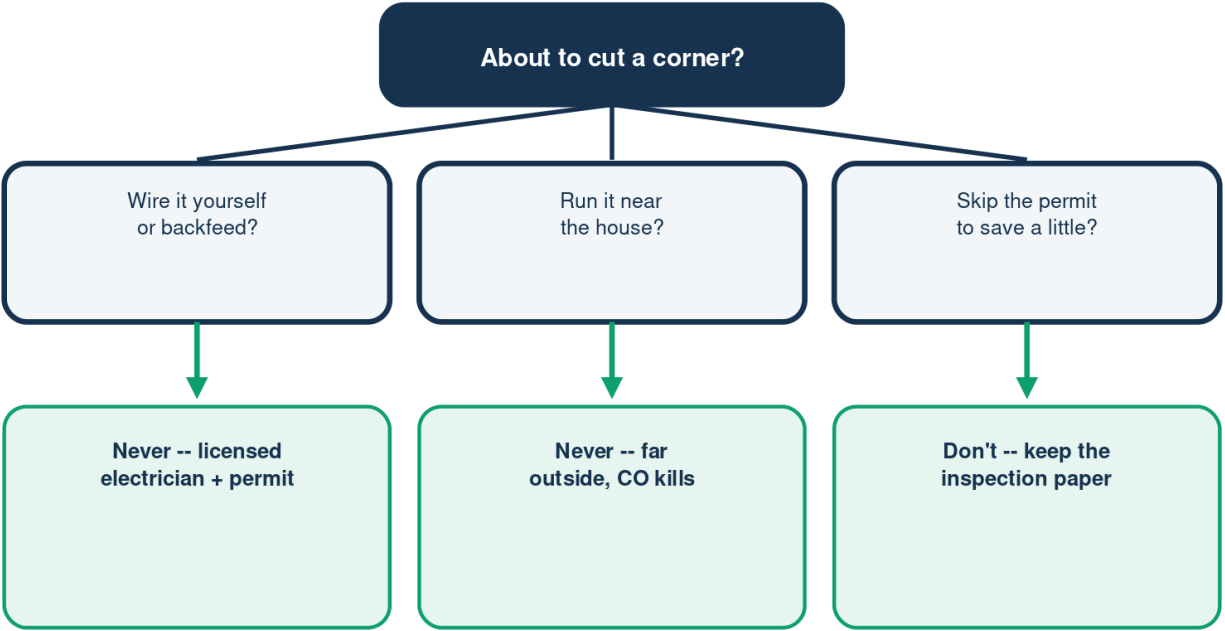
The common slip-ups, paired with the simple fix

	The mistake	The simple fix
Deadly	Backfeeding shortcut	Use the interlock
Deadly	Generator by the house	Run it far outside
Unsafe	DIY, no permit	Licensed pro + permit
Costly	Too much at once	One load at a time

Two are deadly; the rest cost comfort and equipment, not lives.

About to Cut a Corner?

The shortcuts that aren't worth it

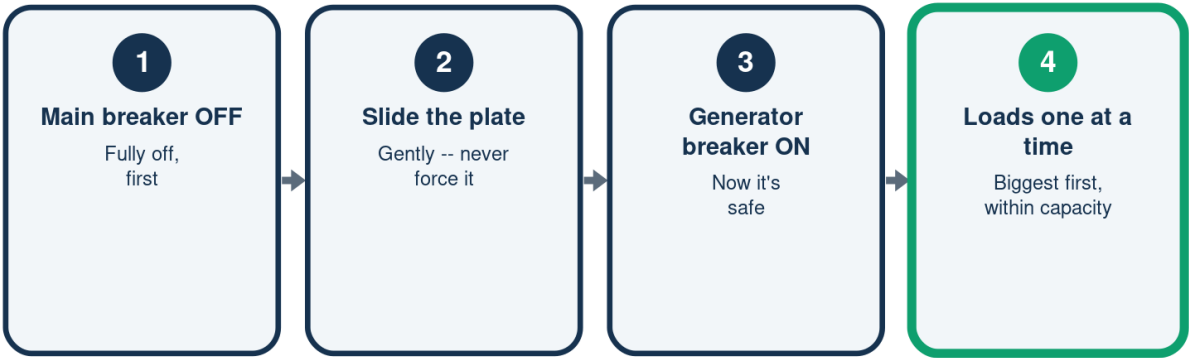


The first two can cost a life -- the panel and the generator are where care matters most.

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

The Panel Steps Folks Rush

Do them calmly, in order, every time



A plate that resists means the main isn't fully off -- don't force it.

Can Be Deadly vs. Just a Hassle

Where to be most careful

	Can be deadly	Just a hassle
Wiring	Backfeeding, DIY	Faded step sheet
The generator	Too near the house	Skipping a dry run
At the panel	Wet-hand hookup	Turning on too much

Get the deadly few right; the rest are worth avoiding but fixable.



Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.
You just have to remember you can call.
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— Bill

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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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