



An Extended Guide · No. 1390

Storm and Outage Readiness With an Interlock

The calm outage is the
one you prepared for

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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. Your interlock was installed by a licensed electrician; readiness is all the simple, safe preparation you do around it before the next storm.

The calm outage is the one you prepared for

The difference between a stressful outage and a calm one is almost always what you did beforehand. This guide is your readiness checklist — the simple steps that make the next storm a non-event with your interlock.

I'm Bill. Over the years I've noticed that the folks who sail through outages aren't the ones with the fanciest equipment — they're the ones who prepared. Fresh fuel, a checked cord, the steps taped by the panel, a practice run under their belt. None of it is hard, and all of it pays off the moment the lights flicker.

Remember, the interlock itself is a licensed electrician's work, and it stays that way. Readiness is your part — the calm, everyday preparation that makes the setup easy to use. Think of this as pulling the whole set together into one checklist for before storm season, and again when a big one's forecast.

★ Want to get storm-ready together?

I'm glad to come help you work through a readiness checklist and do a daylight practice run. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Readiness, on one page

If you remember only these, you're ready for the next storm.

- ❑ Keep fresh, stabilized fuel stored safely — and enough of it.
- ❑ Exercise the generator so it starts willingly, and keep it easy to reach.
- ❑ Check the cord and keep the outdoor inlet cover clear.
- ❑ Test your carbon-monoxide alarms and tape the big-print operating steps by the panel.
- ❑ Do a daylight practice run of the whole interlock sequence, with the household.
- ❑ Keep a short must-run plan and battery lanterns handy; for wells, store drinking water.

✓ Prepared beats powerful

The calmest outages belong to the best-prepared homes, not the ones with the biggest generators. Readiness is the real advantage.

Outages are won beforehand

Everything is easier when the pieces are already in place.

When the power goes out, you don't want to be hunting for the cord, discovering the fuel's gone stale, or trying to recall the interlock steps for the first time in the dark. Every bit of preparation you do on a calm day is one less thing to figure out under stress. Readiness turns an outage from an emergency into a routine — roll the generator out, follow your posted steps, and carry on.

✓ Prepare on calm days

Do your readiness work on a sunny afternoon, not when a storm's already howling. Calm preparation makes for calm outages.

Fuel: fresh, safe, and enough

Stale or too-little fuel is the most common outage frustration — head it off.

Keep enough fuel stored safely to run your generator through an outage of the length your area tends to see, plus a modest reserve. Keep it fresh — rotate it, use stabilizer as directed, and run the generator now and then so fuel moves through it. Store fuel in approved containers, away from the house and any heat or flame, following safe-storage guidance and your generator's manual.

! Store fuel safely

Keep fuel in approved containers, detached from the house, away from heat, flame, and pilot lights. Follow safe-storage guidance and your generator's manual — and never store it indoors.

A generator that's ready to go

An exercised, maintained generator is one that starts when you need it.

Run your generator occasionally under some load, keep up with its oil and service per the manual, and — if it's electric-start — keep the battery charged. Confirm it's clean, dry, and stored where you can get it out and set it up easily, well away from the house. Our maintenance-and-testing guide covers the routine; the readiness point is simple: don't let it sit untouched for a year and then expect it to spring to life in a storm.

✓ Don't let it sit idle

The classic outage disappointment is a generator that won't start because it sat unused. A little exercise prevents it.

The cord and inlet, ready to use

The connection should be effortless when the moment comes.

- ❑ Store the cord loosely coiled, dry, and easy to grab in the dark.
- ❑ Inspect the cord end to end for damage; replace it if cut or cracked.
- ❑ Keep the outdoor inlet cover clear of leaves, ice, and cobwebs.
- ❑ Confirm the generator's spot is clear and the cord reaches the inlet with slack.
- ❑ Keep the cord with the generator and your posted steps, if you can.

✓ Everything in one spot

Store the generator, cord, and step sheet together, so setup is grab-and-go rather than a scavenger hunt.

Tape the operating steps by the panel

You should never have to recall the interlock sequence from memory in the dark.

Keep a written copy of your interlock steps — generator outside and running, plug in the cord, switch the main off, slide the plate, turn the generator breaker on, bring up circuits one at a time, and reverse it all to switch back — taped right by your panel in large, clear print. Add your must-run order and any notes from your electrician. When an outage hits, a glance at the posted steps beats trying to remember, especially by flashlight.

Our using-during-an-outage guide has the full sequence in big print to copy from.

★ I'll make your step sheet

I'm glad to make you a big-print, taped-up step sheet tailored to your exact panel and interlock. Call (330) 200-8042.

Test your carbon-monoxide alarms

This is the readiness step that protects lives, so it never gets skipped.

! 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. Before storm season, test the battery-backup carbon-monoxide alarms on every level and outside the bedrooms, and replace batteries as needed — they're your safety net every time the generator runs during an outage.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

Readiness looks a little different in town than out on a well — mostly in water and fuel reserves, and how long the outages tend to run.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town, with city water and typically shorter outages, your readiness focuses on heat, food, light, and having the interlock steps posted and practiced.

- Keep the furnace circuit in your must-run plan and tested for winter.
- Prep the fridge and freezer — pre-chill, and freeze water jugs.
- A modest fuel reserve usually covers a shorter in-town outage.
- Post the steps and do a practice run so anyone at home can manage it.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country on a well, longer outages and no city water mean deeper readiness: more stored water, more fuel, and a plan to cycle the well pump with your other big loads rather than run everything at once.

- Store several days of drinking water — when the pump stops, so does your water.
- Keep a larger, rotated fuel reserve for longer rural outages.
- Plan to run the well pump in turns with other big loads, within your generator's capacity.
- Tell a neighbor or family member your plan so someone can check on you.

★ Rural readiness feel like a lot?

I'll help you build a thorough plan for a well home — water, fuel, and cycling the pump.
Call (330) 200-8042.

Do a daylight practice run

Practice is what turns steps on paper into calm confidence.

At least once — ideally before each storm season — run the whole interlock sequence in daylight, with anyone else who might need to operate it. Set the generator up outside, plug in, switch the main off, slide the plate, turn the generator breaker on, bring up your circuits, and reverse it to switch back. It doubles as your seasonal test, confirming everything works.

A practice run reveals anything to fix while it's easy and cheap to fix, and it means the real thing feels familiar rather than frightening. Our testing guide covers what a good practice run should include.

✓ Practice with the household

Include your spouse or a nearby family member. If you're ever away or unwell during an outage, they'll be glad they practiced too.

Keep a short must-run plan

Knowing what to power, and in what order, keeps an outage orderly on an interlock.

Because an interlock lets you reach any circuit, you decide what to run — so a little plan keeps you from asking for more than the generator can give at once. Write down what to bring up first (usually the biggest starting load, like a furnace or well pump), then the essentials, then a comfort or two if there's room. Bring one big thing up at a time and let it settle.

Having it written means you won't forget the well pump or overload the generator by flipping on too much. Our load-management guide covers building and using that plan.

✓ **Biggest first, one at a time**

A written order — biggest starting load first, essentials next, within your generator's capacity — takes the guesswork out of a stressful moment.

The calm sequence when the storm hits

With readiness done, an outage is just your posted steps, worked calmly.

Set the generator up outside, well away from the house, and start it with nothing connected. Plug in the cord. At the panel, switch the main off, slide the interlock plate, and turn the generator breaker on. Then bring up your household circuits one at a time, biggest first, within the generator's capacity. When the utility power returns, reverse the steps calmly. Refuel only with the generator off and cooled.

! 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 generator runs the whole time, so this matters most: it stays outdoors only, well away from doors, windows, and vents — never in a garage or on a porch, not even with the door open.

Store water if you're on a well

For well homes, water is a readiness item every bit as important as fuel.

Even with a generator that can power your well pump through the interlock, store several days of drinking water for everyone in the household and any animals — in case of fuel or generator trouble, or moments you'd rather not run the pump. Refresh it periodically so it stays good. It's simple, cheap insurance, and it means a hiccup with the generator never leaves you without water.

Our well-pump guide covers the whole rural water picture in more detail.

✓ A few days' water, always on hand

Stored drinking water is the backup to your backup. Keep several days' worth, refreshed now and then.

Get the fridge and freezer ready

A little food prep before a storm protects your groceries and your budget.

- **Pre-chill** the fridge and freezer a bit colder before a coming storm.
- **Freeze water jugs** to fill freezer gaps and provide backup cold.
- **Keep appliance thermometers** in both, so you can judge food safety.
- **Get out** what you'll want early, so you open the doors less during the outage.
- **Know the safe-time windows** from our refrigerator-and-freezer guide.

✓ A full, cold freezer coasts longer

Prepping the freezer before a storm buys you hours of extra safe time for your food, even before the generator comes on.

A simple readiness kit

Beyond the generator and interlock, a small kit rounds out your readiness.

Keep flashlights and battery lanterns with fresh batteries (candles are a fire risk — prefer battery light), a battery or hand-crank radio for information, phone chargers and a charged power bank, warm blankets, some easy no-cook food and a manual can opener, and a first-aid kit. Store it where you can find it in the dark. None of it is fancy, but together it makes an outage comfortable rather than miserable while your generator handles the big loads.

✓ Battery light, not candles

Skip the candles — an open flame during an outage is a fire risk. Flashlights and battery lanterns are safer and brighter.

When a big storm is forecast

On top of your seasonal readiness, a few last-minute steps when one's coming.

- ❑ Top off your fuel and confirm the generator's ready and reachable.
- ❑ Bring the cord and step sheet to where you'll need them.
- ❑ Pre-chill the fridge and freezer; fill some water containers.
- ❑ Charge phones, devices, and any medical battery backups.
- ❑ Review the interlock steps, and make sure the household knows the plan.

✓ A calm hour before the storm

An hour of preparation before a forecasted storm turns a potential scramble into a calm, ready wait.

Make sure the household is ready too

Readiness isn't just yours — share it with everyone at home.

Make sure a spouse, adult child, or anyone else at home knows where the generator, cord, and step sheet are, and can run the basic interlock sequence and the must-run order. If you're the one who's away, ill, or asleep when an outage hits, someone else can carry on. The interlock's same-every-time sequence makes this genuinely achievable — but only if you've shown them and, ideally, practiced together in daylight.

★ I'll teach the whole household

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

Make it a twice-a-year habit

Readiness isn't one-and-done — it's a light seasonal rhythm.

Tie your readiness to the seasons: a fuller check before storm season in spring, and again before winter. Each time, run through fuel, the generator, the cord and inlet, the CO alarms, your steps and must-run plan, stored water, and any medical needs. It takes an hour or two, twice a year, and it keeps everything current as your needs and equipment change.

✓ Spring and fall, like clockwork

Two readiness checks a year — spring and fall — keep you prepared without it ever feeling like a chore.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about getting ready with an interlock.

Q: How much fuel should I keep on hand?

Enough to run your generator through an outage of the length your area tends to see, plus a modest reserve — kept fresh and stored safely. Rural homes generally keep more, for longer outages.

Q: How often should I practice the interlock steps?

At least before each storm season — a daylight practice run that doubles as your seasonal test. Include anyone who might need to operate it while you're away or unwell.

Q: What's the most-forgotten readiness step?

Fresh fuel and an exercised generator — the classic 'it won't start' surprise. For wells, stored drinking water is a close second.

Q: What should I do when a storm is forecast?

Top off fuel, ready the cord and steps, pre-chill the fridge and freezer, charge devices and any medical backups, and review the interlock plan with the household.

★ Want a readiness check?

Call or text (330) 200-8042 and I'll help you make sure you're truly ready for the next one.

How I help you get ready

Readiness is exactly the kind of practical, caring help I love to provide.

I'll help you build a readiness checklist for your home, make a big-print step sheet for your exact panel, do a daylight practice run with the household, check your fuel and cord, and make sure your CO alarms and any medical plan are current. I'll set it up so your seasonal readiness is a quick, familiar routine — and so the next storm is something you're ready for rather than dreading.

★ Let's get you storm-ready

Call or text (330) 200-8042 and we'll turn readiness into a simple routine you do with confidence.

The short version to carry with you

If the details blur, hold onto these.

- ❑ Fresh fuel, an exercised generator, and a checked, accessible cord and inlet.
- ❑ Tested CO alarms, big-print interlock steps taped by the panel, and a daylight practice run.
- ❑ A short must-run plan; for wells, stored water and a plan to cycle the pump.
- ❑ When a storm's forecast, top off fuel and ready everything an hour ahead.

✓ Keep this guide handy

Use the checklists here each spring and fall — keep this guide with your home papers as your reminder.

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 getting storm-ready with your interlock 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.

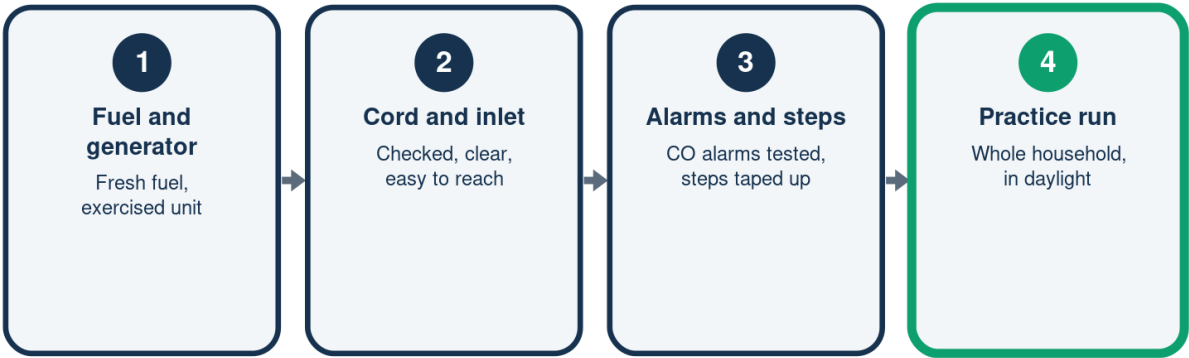
When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day,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

The Readiness Checklist

Done on a calm day, before you need it



For wells, add stored water and a plan to cycle the pump.

Seasonal vs. Storm-Forecast Prep

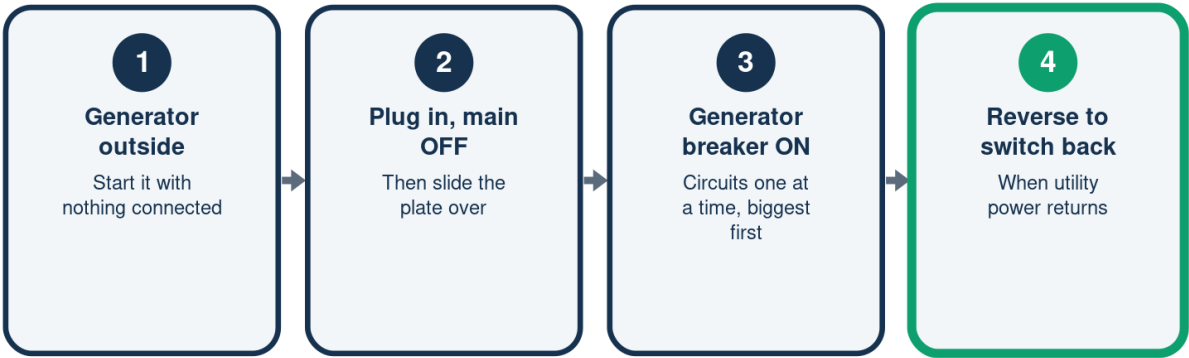
Two kinds of readiness

	Each season	When a storm's coming
Fuel	Stock and rotate	Top it off
Generator	Exercise, service	Confirm it's ready
Fridge/freezer	Keep thermometers	Pre-chill, freeze jugs
Household	Practice the steps	Review, charge devices

A calm hour before a forecasted storm prevents a scramble.

The Calm Outage Sequence

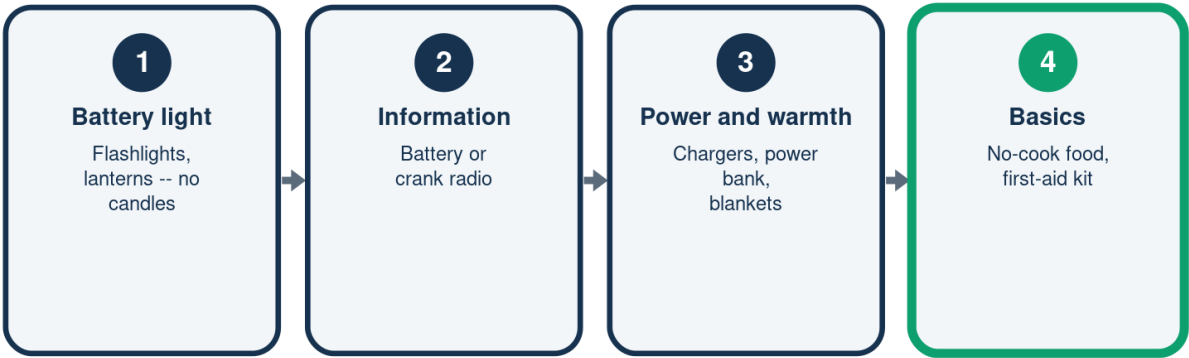
Your posted steps, worked calmly



Generator outdoors only -- and never backfeed.

A Simple Readiness Kit

The little things that make it comfortable



Store it where you can find it in the dark.



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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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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