



An Extended Guide · No. 1383

Testing Your Interlock Setup (a Calm Dry Run)

Rehearse it, so the
real thing is calm

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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. A dry run is the one hands-on part you do yourself — but if anything inside the panel needs attention, that's still a licensed electrician's job, never a do-it-yourself fix.

A calm daylight practice run

The best time to learn how your interlock works is a sunny afternoon when the lights are on and nothing is wrong. A relaxed practice run now is what makes the real thing calm and familiar later.

I'm Bill. Folks are sometimes nervous the first time the power goes out with a new interlock, and I understand that completely. The cure is simple: rehearse the whole thing once or twice in daylight, so your hands already know the steps. By the end of a good dry run, an outage feels like something you've done before — because you have.

To be clear about what's yours and what isn't: operating the interlock — the steps in this guide — is yours to practice. Installing it, and fixing anything that seems wrong inside the panel, is a licensed electrician's job, with a permit. I help you practice and, if something acts up, help you get the right pro.

★ Want a hand with your first dry run?

I'm glad to come do the first practice run alongside you, so you're confident on your own after. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

The dry run, on one page

If you remember only these, your practice run will serve you well.

- ❑ Test soon after installation, and again before storm season — spring and fall are natural times.
- ❑ Walk the whole sequence as a rehearsal: generator outside, connect, main off, slide the plate, generator breaker on, bring up a circuit.
- ❑ Then reverse it calmly, shut the generator down, and refuel only once it's off and cool.
- ❑ Check the plate slides smoothly, the inlet and cord are sound, and your CO alarms work.
- ❑ Confirm your big-print steps taped by the panel are accurate, and practice with anyone else who might run it.
- ❑ If the plate binds or a breaker won't hold, stop and call the electrician — don't force anything.

✓ Daylight beats a dark storm

Every minute you rehearse in calm daylight is a minute you won't be puzzling things out by flashlight during a storm.

Why a practice run is worth it

A dry run does two lovely things at once: it proves the setup works, and it settles your nerves.

The worst possible time to discover a problem — or to learn the steps — is in the dark, in a storm, with the power already out. A calm practice run flips that around. You confirm every part of the system does its job while it's easy to see and think, and you build the muscle memory that makes the real thing feel routine. If anything's off, you find it now, when it's a simple fix and not an emergency.

✓ Confidence is the real prize

Proving the system works matters, but the calm that comes from having done it before is just as valuable when the lights actually go out.

When to do a dry run

A few natural moments make good anchors, so testing never gets forgotten.

- **Right after installation and inspection** — do your first run while it's all fresh.
- **Before storm season** — a run each spring and fall keeps you ready year-round.
- **After any change** to the generator, the cord, or your panel.
- **Whenever someone new** might need to operate it, so they get to practice too.

Tying your practice run to the changing seasons makes it easy to remember, and it doubles as the seasonal test our maintenance guide recommends — one session, two benefits.

✓ Two anchors a year

Spring and fall are easy to remember and land right before the seasons that test your power most. Put them on the calendar.

Walking the full sequence

Here's the whole rehearsal, done just as you would in a real outage — only calmer.

- ❑ Set the generator up outside, well away from the house, and start it with nothing connected.
- ❑ Plug the cord into the outdoor inlet, then into the generator.
- ❑ At the panel, switch the main breaker off.
- ❑ Slide the interlock plate over — it should move smoothly with the main off.
- ❑ Turn the generator breaker on, then bring up a circuit or two, biggest first, within the generator's capacity.

✓ Go slowly and narrate it

Say each step out loud as you do it. Slow and spoken is how a sequence becomes second nature.

Check that the plate slides smoothly

The sliding plate is the heart of the interlock, so give it your attention during the run.

With the main breaker off, the interlock plate should slide over easily and let the generator breaker come on. With the main on, it should block the generator breaker just as surely. That smooth, definite motion is the whole safety of the thing working exactly as designed. If the plate feels stiff, sticky, or won't move the way it should, that's your signal to stop and call the electrician — never force it.

! Smooth and definite, or stop

A plate that binds or sticks isn't a quirk to muscle through — it's a reason to stop and have your electrician look. Forcing it can damage the safety that protects you.

Check the inlet and cord

The outdoor connection lives in the weather, so a dry run is the perfect time to look it over.

- **Inspect the cord end to end** for cuts, cracks, or damaged ends — replace it if you find any, never tape it.
- **Check the inlet cover** seals snugly and is clear of leaves, ice, and spiderwebs.
- **Make sure the cord reaches** from the generator's safe spot with some slack to spare.
- **Confirm the connections** seat firmly and lock as they should.

Our inlet-box-and-cord guide covers these outdoor parts in more depth; on a dry run, a quick, careful look is usually all it takes.

! Retire a damaged cord

The heavy generator cord carries serious power. A cut or cracked one is a real hazard — replace it rather than patching it.

Check that your CO alarms work

A dry run is also the moment to make sure your carbon-monoxide alarms are ready, since the real thing means a running generator.

Press the test button on each carbon-monoxide alarm and confirm it sounds. Make sure you have battery-backup CO alarms on each floor and outside the bedrooms, and freshen the batteries if they're due. These alarms are your early warning any time the generator runs, so having them tested and working is every bit as important as the interlock steps themselves.

✓ Test the alarms while you're at it

A dry run and a CO-alarm test go hand in hand — both are about being ready before the generator ever runs for real.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

A dry run looks much the same everywhere, but what you most want to confirm differs between a home in town and one out in the country.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, your must-run list is usually short, so your practice run is quick — confirm the furnace, the fridge, and a few lights come up cleanly on generator power, and you're set.

- A short list makes for a quick, low-stress rehearsal.
- Confirm the furnace circuit comes up on the generator before winter.
- Bring the fridge up on its own, then add a light or two.
- City water keeps flowing, so heat, food, and light are your focus.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country on a well, the well pump is the load you most want to be sure of — no power means no water — so your dry run should always include starting it on generator power and confirming it runs cleanly.

- Always test the well pump specifically — confirm it starts and runs on the generator.
- It's a big 240-volt load, so watch that it starts within the generator's capacity.
- Include the sump pump and furnace in the run too, if you rely on them.
- Longer rural outages make a confident, well-rehearsed routine especially worthwhile.

★ On a well? Let's include the pump in your run

I'll help you set up a practice run that always confirms your well pump starts cleanly on the generator. Call (330) 200-8042.

Running the generator safely, even for a test

A dry run means the generator actually runs, so the biggest generator rule applies to a test exactly as it does to a real outage.

Set the generator up outside before you start it, keep it well away from the house the whole time, and never bring it into a garage or onto a porch 'just for a quick test.' When you're done, shut it down properly, and only ever add fuel once it's off and cool. A test is no reason to relax any of this.

! 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. A test still runs the engine, so it goes outdoors only, well away from the house, exhaust pointed away, every single time — and this is exactly when you confirm your CO alarms work.

Confirm your big-print steps are right

The steps taped by your panel are only useful if they're accurate — a dry run is when you check.

As you go through the sequence, follow your written big-print steps and make sure each one matches what you actually do. Is the order right? Are the breaker labels correct? Is the print large and clear enough to read by flashlight? If anything's off, fix the card now, while it's fresh — those steps are what a calmer version of you (or a neighbor, or an adult child) will lean on during the real thing.

★ I'll help with big, clear steps

If your posted steps are missing, faded, or hard to read, I'm glad to help you redo them in large, plain print. Call (330) 200-8042.

Practice with anyone who might run it

The person who does the steps in a real outage might not be you, so bring others into the rehearsal.

A spouse, an adult child, a neighbor who checks in — anyone who might need to bring the house onto generator power should get to practice it in daylight at least once. Walking through the sequence together means nobody is reading the steps for the very first time in a dark, stressful moment. It's also a nice chance to make sure the posted steps make sense to someone who isn't you.

✓ More than one calm operator

If two people in the household have done the dry run, an outage is far less daunting no matter who is home when it happens.

Bring up a circuit and watch it work

The satisfying part of a dry run is seeing your circuits come to life on generator power.

With the panel safely on generator power, switch on a circuit or two and confirm they work — the furnace, the fridge, a well pump if you have one. Bring your biggest load up first and add others one at a time, staying within the generator's capacity, so you get a real feel for what you can run at once. This is also where you'd notice if a particular circuit doesn't come up as expected, which is good to know before an outage rather than during one.

✓ One at a time, biggest first

Practicing the one-at-a-time, biggest-first habit now means it'll feel natural when it counts. Our load-management guide goes deeper.

Then reverse it, calmly

Switching back at the end of your run is just the sequence in reverse — practice that too.

- ❑ Switch your household circuits back off, one at a time.
- ❑ Turn the generator breaker off.
- ❑ Slide the interlock plate back over.
- ❑ Turn the main breaker back on — the house is on utility power again.
- ❑ Shut the generator down, and refuel only once it's off and cool.

✓ The reverse matters too

Practicing the switch-back means you'll return to utility power just as smoothly when the real outage ends.

If something's off, stop and call

A dry run's real value is catching trouble early — so know the signs that mean stop.

- **The plate binds, sticks, or won't move** the way it should — stop and call the electrician.
- **A breaker won't hold** or trips without an obvious overload — stop and call.
- **A burning smell, warmth, or discoloration** around the panel — stop right away.
- **Anything that behaves differently** than it did last time — worth a call.

None of these are things to force or puzzle out yourself — anything inside the panel is a licensed electrician's territory. Our troubleshooting guide helps you tell a simple hiccup from a real stop-and-call sign.

! Odd behavior means call, not force

If the plate or a breaker acts up, resist the urge to force it. Stop, and call your electrician — it's their equipment to service safely.

Make the dry run a gentle habit

One rehearsal is good; a light, regular rhythm is even better.

Tie your dry run to the seasons — once in spring before storm season, once in fall before winter — and jot a quick note each time: the date, that it went smoothly, which circuits you confirmed, and anything you noticed. Over time that little log helps you spot patterns and remember what's due, and it doubles as the seasonal test our maintenance guide describes. Two easy sessions a year keep everything ready without any fuss.

✓ Write a line after each run

A dated note — 'ran fine, furnace and pump good' — is all it takes. Future you will be glad to have the record.

Common testing mistakes

A few slip-ups take the value out of a dry run. Sidestep these.

- **Never testing at all** until an actual outage — then learning the steps in the dark.
- **Starting the generator indoors or too close** 'just for a test' — it goes outside, every time.
- **Forcing a plate** that binds instead of stopping and calling the electrician.
- **Skipping the CO-alarm test** that a dry run is the perfect moment for.
- **Practicing alone** when someone else may need to run it during an outage.

! The big one: never testing

The most common and costly mistake is simply never doing a dry run. A setup you haven't practiced is one you can't be calm about.

Why a calm dry run matters so much

Let's tie it together, because this is one of my favorite bits of advice to give.

An interlock is simple and dependable, but the first time you use anything under stress, it feels harder than it is. A daylight dry run takes that first-time pressure and moves it to a calm afternoon, where a small surprise is just something to note, not a crisis. By the time a real storm knocks the power out, you're not learning — you're remembering. That shift, from figuring-it-out to already-know-it, is the whole reason a dry run is worth an hour of your time.

✓ Move the first time to a calm day

The dry run's magic is simple: it makes the real outage your second time, not your first. Second times are always calmer.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about testing an interlock setup.

Q: How often should I test my interlock setup?

Do a dry run soon after installation, then twice a year — spring and fall are easy to remember and land right before the hard seasons. It doubles as your seasonal maintenance test.

Q: What exactly do I do in a dry run?

Walk the whole real sequence in daylight: generator outside, connect, main off, slide the plate, generator breaker on, bring up a circuit, then reverse it and shut down. Check the plate, cord, and CO alarms as you go.

Q: What if the plate binds or a breaker won't hold?

Stop and call your electrician — don't force anything. A plate should slide smoothly with the main off; if it doesn't, that's a sign to have the pro look. See our troubleshooting guide.

Q: Should anyone else practice it?

Yes — anyone who might operate it during an outage should do a daylight run at least once, so no one is reading the steps for the first time in the dark.

★ More testing questions?

Call or text (330) 200-8042 — I'm glad to help you practice until it feels easy.

How I help you practice

A calm first run with a patient person beside you is exactly the kind of help I love to give.

I'll come do your first dry run alongside you, walk the sequence at your pace, help you check the plate, cord, and CO alarms, and make sure your big-print steps are accurate and easy to read. If anyone else in the household should know the steps, I'm glad to include them. And if anything acts up during the run, I'll help you get a licensed electrician — I don't open the panel myself. The goal is that you feel calm and capable long before the first real storm.

★ Let's practice together

Call or text (330) 200-8042 and we'll do a relaxed dry run so the real thing feels like something you've already done.

The short version to carry with you

If the details blur, hold onto these.

- ❑ Do a daylight dry run after install and before storm season — spring and fall.
- ❑ Walk the whole sequence, then reverse it, with the generator safely outside.
- ❑ Check the plate slides smoothly, the cord and inlet are sound, and your CO alarms work.
- ❑ If the plate binds or a breaker won't hold, stop and call the electrician.

✓ Keep this guide handy

Use it as your dry-run checklist each spring and fall — keep it with your home papers as a 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 testing your interlock setup with a calm dry run 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.

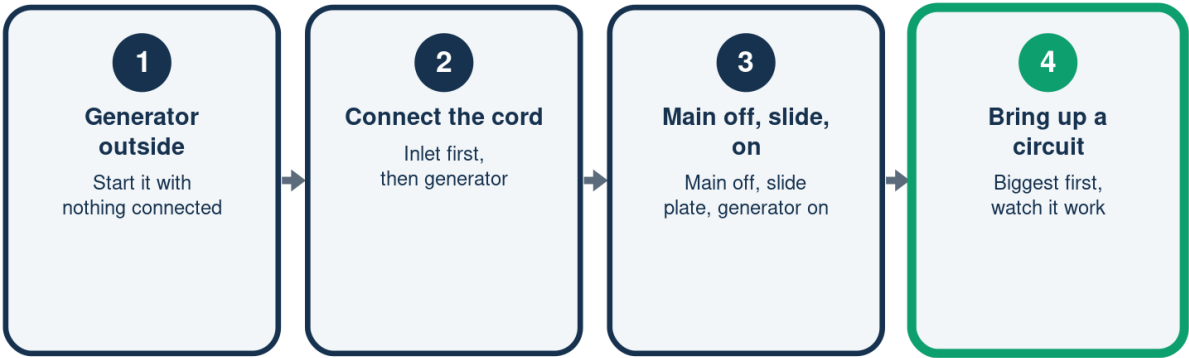
When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day,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

A Calm Daylight Dry Run

Walk the real sequence, only calmer



Then reverse the same steps to switch back -- practice that too.

What to Check on Your Run

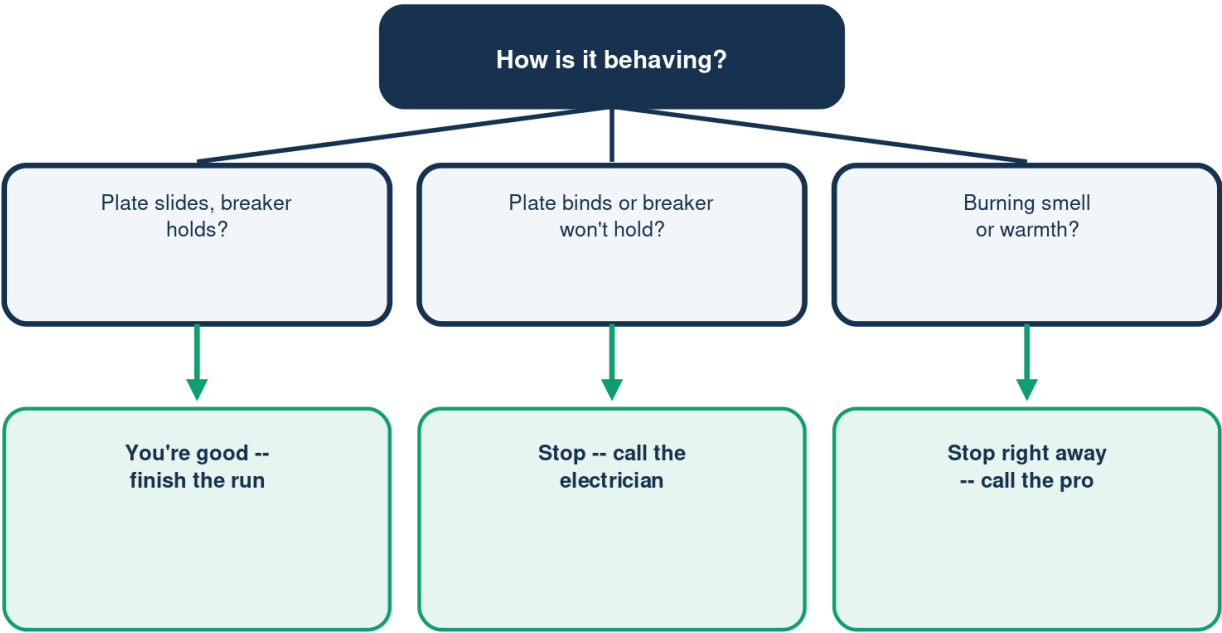
A quick look at each part

	Check	Looking for
The plate	Slides smoothly	with the main off
Inlet and cord	Sound, sealed,	no cuts or cracks
CO alarms	Press test --	they sound
Written steps	Accurate and	big enough to read

Catch anything now, in daylight, not during a storm.

Smooth, or Stop and Call?

Knowing when to stop the run

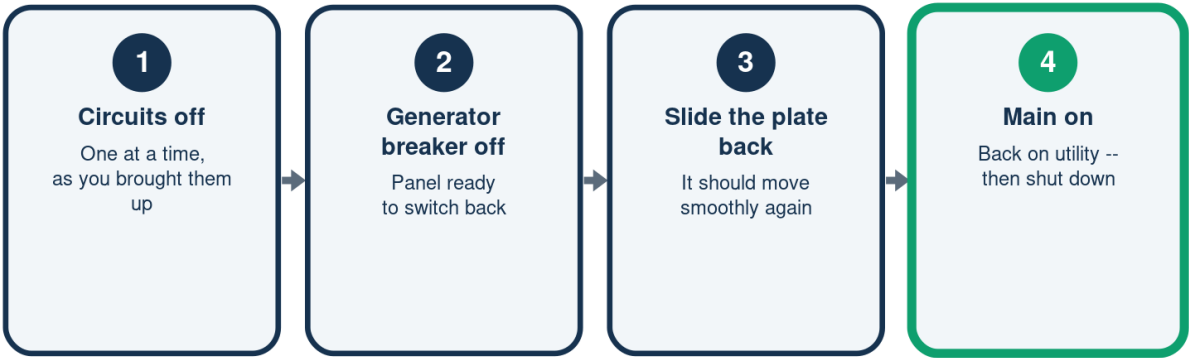


Never force the plate -- anything inside the panel is the electrician's job.

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

Then Reverse to Switch Back

The sequence, the other way



Shut the generator down, and refuel only once it's off and cool.



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

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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