



An Extended Guide · No. 1367

What Is a Generator Interlock Kit?

A small metal plate
that keeps you safe

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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. This first guide simply explains what an interlock kit is and why it is safe — the how-to-choose and how-to-use guides come later in the series.

A small metal plate that keeps you safe

A generator interlock kit is one of the safest, most affordable ways to power your home from a portable generator during an outage. This guide explains, in plain English, what it is and why it works — no jargon, no pressure.

I'm Bill. Folks ask me all the time, 'What exactly is an interlock kit, and is it safe?' The short answer is yes, it's very safe when a licensed electrician installs it — and it's clever in how simple it is. By the end of this guide you'll understand what it does and why so many of my neighbors choose one.

One thing up front, and I'll repeat it because it matters: putting an interlock on your panel is electrical work. It's a licensed electrician's job, almost always with a permit and an inspection. It is not a do-it-yourself project, and it isn't something I do myself. What I do is help you understand it, choose well, and use it calmly.

★ Have a question as you read?

If anything here isn't clear, just call or text me at (330) 200-8042. I'm always happy to explain it a different way — there's never a charge to ask a question.

The whole idea, on one page

If you remember only these things, you already understand the heart of it.

- ❑ An interlock kit is a sliding metal plate added to your existing electrical panel.
- ❑ It makes it physically impossible to have your main breaker and your generator breaker on at the same time.
- ❑ That's what keeps generator power and utility power from ever meeting — the whole point.
- ❑ It lets you safely power your regular household circuits from a portable generator during an outage.
- ❑ It's usually the more affordable of the safe options, because it reuses the panel you already have.
- ❑ It's a licensed electrician's job, with a permit — never a do-it-yourself project.

✓ One sentence to keep

An interlock kit is a safe, code-approved way to run your house on a generator — and the safe alternative to the dangerous 'backfeeding' shortcut you may have heard about.

What an interlock kit actually is

Let's start with the thing itself, plainly.

An interlock kit is a sturdy metal bracket, with a sliding plate, that a licensed electrician mounts on the front of your existing breaker panel. It sits over your main breaker and one nearby breaker that becomes your 'generator breaker.' The plate can slide up or down, and its shape is what does the safety work.

Because it lives right on the panel you already have, an interlock kit doesn't add a separate box on the wall. It's a small, tidy addition that turns your ordinary panel into one that can safely accept generator power. That simplicity is a big part of why it's often the more affordable safe choice.

✓ Small part, big job

It's a modest-looking piece of metal, but its job is enormous: it's what keeps your generator and the utility's power from ever touching.

The sliding plate, and why it's clever

The genius of an interlock is that it uses simple geometry — not electronics — to keep you safe.

The plate is shaped so that it can only be in one of two positions. In one position, your main breaker is on and the generator breaker is physically blocked from turning on. To turn the generator breaker on, you first have to switch the main breaker off, which lets you slide the plate over — and only then can the generator breaker come on.

So the two breakers can never both be on at once. Your house is connected either to the utility or to your generator, and never to both. There's no computer, no battery, nothing to fail — just a piece of metal that can't be in two places at the same time.

! This is the safety, right here

Keeping the main and generator breakers from ever being on together is the entire safety principle. It's simple, mechanical, and reliable — which is exactly why it's trusted.

The parts of a complete setup

The plate is the heart of it, but a full interlock setup has a few pieces working together.

- **The interlock plate** on your panel — the sliding piece that enforces one-or-the-other.
- **A generator breaker** the electrician adds to your panel, which feeds power in from the generator.
- **An inlet box** mounted outside — a weatherproof outlet you plug the generator into.
- **A heavy generator cord** that runs from the generator to that inlet box.
- **Your own panel and breakers**, which do the rest of the work you already know.

✓ It's a system, not just a plate

When folks say 'interlock kit,' they usually mean this whole setup — plate, breaker, inlet, and cord. Our inlet-box-and-cord guide covers those outdoor parts in detail.

The dangerous problem it's built to solve

To see why an interlock matters, it helps to know the danger it prevents.

Without a safe connection, some people try to feed a generator into the house through a wall or dryer outlet using a cord with plugs on both ends. This is called 'backfeeding,' and it is genuinely deadly. It can send power backward onto the utility lines and electrocute a lineworker trying to restore your power, and it can start a fire in your home when the utility comes back.

An interlock kit exists to do the very thing backfeeding tries to do — power your house from a generator — but safely and legally, with no way for the two power sources to meet. It's the right way to solve the same problem.

! Never, ever backfeed

Please never connect a generator through a wall or dryer outlet with a double-ended cord. It kills people. An interlock kit (or a transfer switch) is the safe, legal way — our dangers-of-backfeeding guide explains why.

Why an interlock is considered safe

Three simple reasons give an interlock its good reputation.

- **It's mechanical.** A shaped plate can't be fooled or glitch the way electronics might — it simply can't allow both breakers on.
- **It's code-approved.** Listed interlock kits are recognized, inspected devices — not a workaround or a hack.
- **It's installed by a pro.** A licensed electrician wires it and a permit gets it inspected, so you know it was done right.

Put those together and you have a device that does one job — keep the two power sources apart — and does it about as reliably as anything in your home.

✓ Simple is a feature

In safety gear, simple and mechanical is often better than clever and electronic. There's very little to go wrong with a sliding plate.

What an interlock kit is not

A few quick clarifications save a lot of confusion.

An interlock kit is not automatic. It won't sense an outage or switch over by itself — you do the steps by hand, in order, which our using-during-an-outage guide walks through. It's also not a generator, and not a battery: it adds no power of its own. It simply lets your generator's power reach your circuits safely.

And it's not a separate box of labeled switches like a transfer switch. With an interlock, you use your normal household breakers on generator power. Our interlock-versus-transfer-switch guide compares the two honestly.

✓ It's a safe gate, not a power source

Think of an interlock as a safe gate between your generator and your house. The generator makes the power; the interlock just makes sure it flows the safe way.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

An interlock works the same everywhere, but what you'll want to power with it looks different in town than out in the country.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, your must-run list during an outage is usually short — the furnace, the fridge, some lights, maybe the internet. An interlock lets you reach those circuits from your own panel without a separate box.

- City water keeps flowing in most outages, so your focus is heat, food, and light.
- A short list is easy to manage by hand on generator power — our load-management guide shows how.
- The furnace is usually the main hardwired reason you need a panel connection at all rather than just extension cords.
- An interlock's affordability makes it a friendly first step into backup power.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country on a private well, no power means no running water, so the well pump joins your list. An interlock can reach a well pump too, as long as your generator is sized to handle it — see our sizing guide.

- A well pump is a big, hardwired 240-volt load; an interlock gives you a safe way to power it during an outage.
- Rural outages often run longer, so being able to power water, heat, and a sump pump from one panel matters.
- You'll likely run the well pump in turns with other big loads rather than all at once — gentle load-cycling.
- Our well-pump and sump-pump guides go deeper on these rural essentials.

★ Not sure what you'd need to power?

Tell me about your home and whether you're on city water or a well, and I'll help you picture what an interlock would do for you. Call (330) 200-8042.

How you'd actually use one, in brief

You don't need the full operating steps yet — but a quick picture helps it all make sense.

During an outage, you set the generator up safely outside, plug its cord into the outdoor inlet, then go to your panel: switch the main breaker off, slide the interlock plate over, and turn the generator breaker on. Now your panel is safely on generator power, and you switch on the household circuits you want, one at a time.

When the utility power returns, you reverse those steps calmly. That's the whole rhythm. Our using-during-an-outage guide lays out every step in large, clear print you can tape by the panel.

! The generator still goes outside

However you connect it, a generator must always run outdoors, well away from the house, because of carbon monoxide. The interlock handles the electrical safety; you handle the exhaust safety.

What you can power with an interlock

This is one of the interlock's real advantages worth understanding early.

Because an interlock works through your own panel, you can potentially power any circuit in the house — as long as you don't ask for more at one moment than your generator can give. You're not limited to a short list of pre-wired circuits the way you are with some transfer switches. You choose, moment to moment, what to run.

That flexibility comes with a small responsibility: you manage the load yourself by turning breakers on and off. It's not hard, and our load-management guide makes it easy — but it's good to know that's part of the deal.

✓ Flexibility with a little responsibility

Reach-any-breaker flexibility is a lovely thing. The trade is that you keep an eye on how much you're running at once. Manageable, and worth it.

Will an interlock fit your panel?

Not every kit fits every panel, and this is one of the first things a pro checks.

Interlock plates are made to match particular panel brands and layouts, so the right kit has to suit your specific panel. Some older, unusual, or completely full panels may need a different approach, or a bit of rearranging first. This isn't something to guess at from a website — a licensed electrician confirms it by looking at your actual panel.

Our panel-compatibility guide explains what makes a panel a good fit, and our questions-to-ask guide helps you get a clear answer during a quote visit.

! Let the pro confirm the fit

Whether a given interlock suits your panel is a question only a licensed electrician can answer in person. It's a normal part of getting a quote.

Why the permit and inspection matter

The permit isn't red tape — it's a second set of expert eyes on work that really matters.

Because an interlock ties a generator into your home's electrical system, most areas require a permit and an inspection. That means a local inspector confirms the work was done safely and to code. It protects you, protects the utility crews working on the lines, and gives you proof the job was done right — which can matter for insurance.

A good electrician handles the permit as a normal part of the job. If someone offers to skip it to save a little money, that's a red flag, not a favor. Our permits-and-inspection and code-and-insurance guides go deeper.

! Skipping the permit isn't a shortcut

An unpermitted panel job can be unsafe and can cause insurance headaches. Insist on doing it properly — it's your protection.

How it differs from a transfer switch

You'll hear both names, so here's the difference in a nutshell.

A transfer switch is a separate box of labeled switches mounted next to your panel; you flip 'Furnace,' 'Fridge,' and so on. An interlock kit is a plate on your existing panel, and you use your normal breakers. Both are safe, both need a licensed electrician and a permit, and both keep the two power sources apart.

The interlock is usually more affordable and gives you access to any breaker; the transfer switch offers labeled, foolproof simplicity that's easy for anyone to use. Neither is 'better' — it's about fit. Our full comparison guide lays them side by side.

✓ Both are safe — it's about fit

This isn't a safety decision; both are safe when installed right. It comes down to budget and how you like things to feel.

Who an interlock kit suits well

After helping many folks, I see some clear patterns for who loves an interlock.

- **Budget-minded folks** who want a safe, code-approved connection without the cost of a separate box.
- **People comfortable with their own panel** who don't mind flipping a few breakers by hand.
- **Homes that want flexibility** to power different circuits at different times, within the generator's limits.
- **Anyone replacing a dangerous habit** — if you've ever been tempted to backfeed, this is the safe answer.

★ Wondering if it fits your life?

Tell me how you'd want to use backup power and I'll give you my honest read on whether an interlock is your best fit. No commission, just help. (330) 200-8042.

Common worries, gently answered

A few concerns come up again and again. Here's the reassurance.

Q: Is it really safe to power my whole panel this way?

Yes, when installed by a licensed electrician. The interlock makes it impossible to connect to the utility and generator at once — that's the safety. You just don't run more than the generator can handle at one time.

Q: Isn't a plate too simple to be safe?

Its simplicity is exactly why it's trusted. A shaped piece of metal can't glitch or be fooled — it physically can't allow both breakers on.

Q: Will I have to remember complicated steps?

No. It's the same short sequence every time, and you'll keep a big-print copy taped by the panel. I'm glad to practice it with you in daylight.

✓ Worry is normal — and answerable

Every good question here has a calm answer. If yours isn't here, our other guides or a quick call will cover it.

Myths about interlock kits

Let's clear up a few things folks sometimes get wrong.

- **'It's a cheap hack.'** No — a listed interlock is a code-approved, inspected device, just a more affordable safe option.
- **'I can install it myself since it's simple.'** No — it's panel work and a licensed electrician's job, with a permit.
- **'It powers the whole house automatically.'** No — you operate it by hand, and only within your generator's capacity.
- **'An interlock is less safe than a transfer switch.'** No — both are equally safe when installed properly.

! The one that matters most

The myth worth crushing is that any generator hookup can be do-it-yourself. Panel work is a licensed pro's job, every time — for an interlock or a transfer switch.

How to get started, calmly

If an interlock sounds right, here's the unhurried path from here.

- ❑ Read our sizing guide to match a generator to what you want to run.
- ❑ Get a quote from a licensed electrician who'll pull a permit.
- ❑ Confirm the right interlock fits your specific panel.
- ❑ Have it installed and inspected, then do a daylight practice run.
- ❑ Keep the using-during-an-outage steps taped by your panel.

★ I'll help you through each step

From sizing to finding a trustworthy electrician to practicing the steps, I can walk you through the whole thing at your pace. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about what an interlock kit is.

Q: What is a generator interlock kit in simple terms?

It's a sliding metal plate on your electrical panel that makes it impossible to have your main breaker and generator breaker on at once. That lets you safely power your home's circuits from a portable generator during an outage.

Q: Is an interlock kit safe?

Yes — when installed by a licensed electrician with a permit. It's a mechanical, code-approved device with very little to go wrong.

Q: Can I install an interlock kit myself?

No. It's electrical panel work, a licensed electrician's job, almost always with a permit and inspection. It's never a do-it-yourself project.

Q: How is it different from backfeeding?

Backfeeding through a wall or dryer outlet is dangerous and illegal — it can kill lineworkers and start fires. An interlock does the same job (powering your house from a generator) the safe, legal way.

★ Still have a question?

Call or text (330) 200-8042 anytime. I'm always glad to explain how an interlock works in whatever way makes it click for you.

My honest take

After years of helping neighbors get ready for outages, here's how I sum up the interlock.

An interlock kit is one of my favorite recommendations for folks who want real backup power without a big price tag. It's safe, it's simple, it reuses the panel you have, and it gives you the flexibility to power what you need. The only 'catch' is that you operate it by hand — and honestly, that's easy once you've done it once.

Most of all, it's the safe answer to a dangerous temptation. If you've ever thought about backfeeding, an interlock is the way to get what you wanted without the deadly risk. That alone makes it worth knowing about.

★ Let's see if it's right for you

There's no pressure and nothing to sell. Tell me about your home and I'll give you my honest read. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

The short version to carry with you

If the details blur, hold onto these.

- ❑ An interlock is a sliding plate that keeps your main and generator breakers from ever being on together.
- ❑ That's what makes it a safe, legal way to run your house on a generator.
- ❑ It's usually the affordable safe option, and it uses your existing panel.
- ❑ It's a licensed electrician's job with a permit — never DIY, and never backfeeding.

✓ Keep this guide handy

This is the 'what is it' guide. When you're ready to choose or use one, the rest of the series is here for you.

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 understanding what a generator interlock kit is 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.

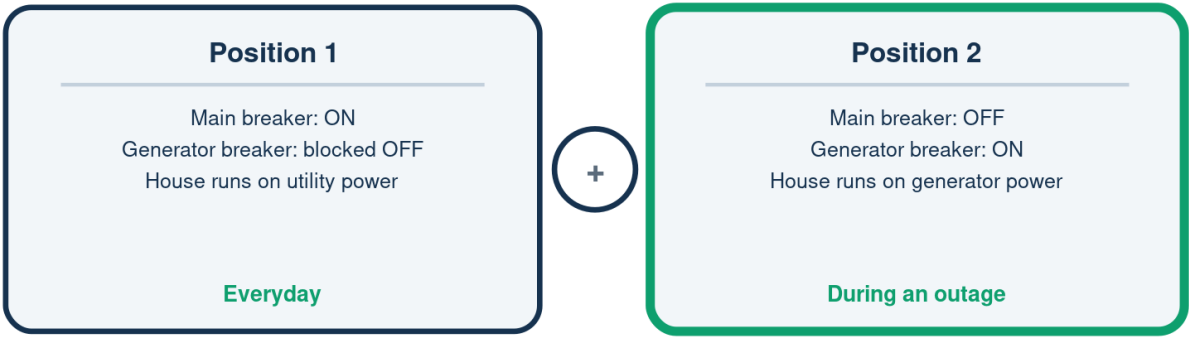
When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day,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

A sliding plate on your existing panel

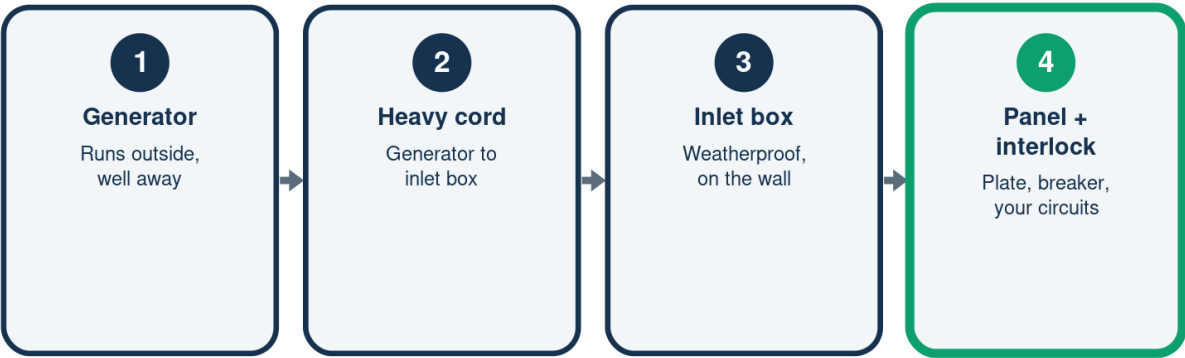


The plate allows only one position at a time -- never both on.

A simple, mechanical safety -- no electronics to fail.

The Parts of a Setup

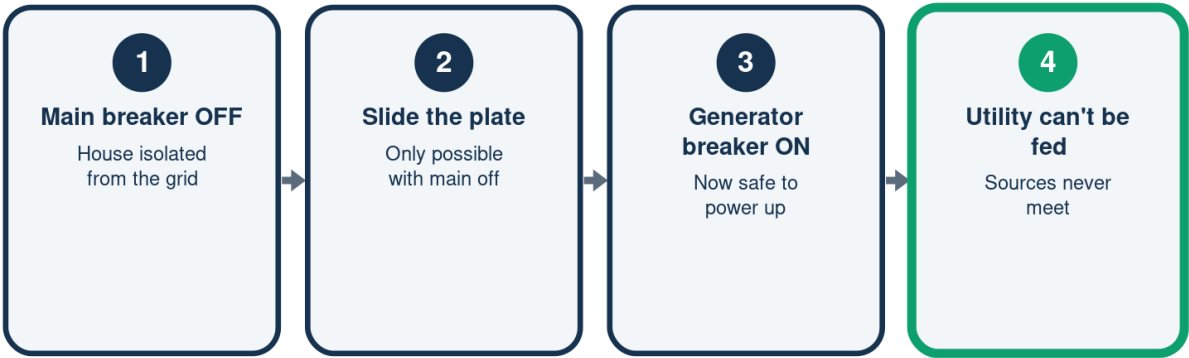
How the pieces connect, outside to in



The interlock plate is the safety heart of the whole system.

How It Prevents Backfeed

The same short order, every time



With the main off, no power can flow back to the utility lines.

The Safe Way vs. Backfeeding

Why an interlock is the right answer

	Interlock kit	Backfeeding
Legal?	Yes, code-approved	No, illegal
Sources kept apart?	Always	No -- deadly
Installed by	Licensed pro	A risky shortcut
Safe for crews?	Yes	Can kill them

An interlock does backfeeding's job -- the safe, legal way.



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

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— *Bill*



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