



An Extended Guide · No. 1439

Buying a Used Power Station

How to check battery
health before you pay

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✓ The best news first — this one is safe indoors

Here is the best news about a portable power station, and the reason it earns a place in your home: it is a big rechargeable battery in a case, not an engine. It burns no fuel, so it gives off no exhaust and no carbon monoxide — the invisible, deadly gas that makes a gas generator a strictly outdoors-only machine. That means a power station is safe to use right inside your home, in any room, with the windows closed — beside your chair, on the nightstand, next to a medical device. A few simple habits keep it that way: charge it with the cord it came with, give it a little air while it works (don't bury it under a blanket or shut it in a tight cabinet), keep it away from water and from baking heat, and never use one that is cracked, soaked, or swollen. A used one can be a fine value, because the outside of a power station barely wears — but the battery inside is the part that ages, and this whole guide is about checking it honestly before you hand over a dollar.

How to check battery health before you pay

A used power station can be a genuine bargain — or a box with a tired battery you can't see. The good news is that a few plain questions and simple tests tell you most of what you need to know. This guide walks you through buying used with your eyes open, one step at a time.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. I've spent 30-plus years helping folks make sensible choices about their gear, patiently and without the jargon. Think of this as me riding along to look at a used unit with you before you decide.

You don't need to be technical to do this well. The whole trick is knowing that a battery ages quietly on the inside, and learning the handful of questions and checks that bring that hidden wear out into the open. We'll take them slowly.

★ There's nothing to buy from me

I don't sell power stations and I earn no commission, so this is honest advice with no angle. If you find a used one and want a second opinion before you pay, call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll look at it together.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you'll buy a used power station wisely, or know when to walk away.

- ❑ The battery is the part that wears, and you can't see its health from the outside — so you have to ask and test.
- ❑ Ask the cycle count (many units show it on the screen or in an app), the age, and how it was stored.
- ❑ Prefer the newer LFP chemistry, which lasts far longer than older lithium.
- ❑ Look it over for swelling, cracks, water marks, damaged ports, and a loud fan.
- ❑ Test before you pay: does it hold a charge, and do the outlets actually power something?
- ❑ Walk away from a swollen unit or one that won't hold a charge — no price is low enough for that.

✓ One line to hold onto

New you can trust on paper; used you have to check with your own eyes and hands. If the seller won't let you look and test, that's your answer right there.

The one thing you're really buying: battery health

A power station is mostly a battery in a case. When you buy it used, the case is the easy part — it's the battery's hidden condition that makes or breaks the deal.

Every rechargeable battery wears a little with age and with use. Each full charge-and-drain is called a cycle, and over many cycles, and over the years, a battery slowly holds a bit less than it did when new. That's normal and gradual — but it means a used station may not last as long on a charge as the same model fresh from the box.

The trouble is you can't see any of this by looking. A five-year-old, hard-used unit can look identical to a nearly new one. So the whole job of buying used is dragging that invisible wear into the light with a few questions and a test or two before money changes hands.

✓ Judge the battery, not the box

A scuff on the case means nothing. A tired battery means everything. Spend your attention on how the battery has lived, not on how shiny the outside looks.

Ask the cycle count first

The single most useful number for a used station is its cycle count — how many times it's been charged and drained over its life.

Think of cycles as mileage on a car. A unit with a low cycle count has plenty of life left; one with a very high count has done a lot of living already. Many good stations show the cycle count right on the screen or in the maker's phone app, so it's often just a matter of asking the seller to pull it up while you watch.

There's no single magic number to quote — it depends on the battery type and the model — but the newer LFP chemistry is rated for far more cycles than older lithium, so the same count means very different things on different units. When in doubt, fewer cycles is better, and a seller who can show you the number is a seller worth trusting.

! No cycle count, extra caution

If a unit can show its cycle count and the seller won't or can't, treat that as a small red flag. Either they don't know how it's lived, or they'd rather you didn't. Lean harder on your own hands-on test.

Ask the age, and how it was stored

Two units with the same cycle count can be in very different shape, depending on how old they are and how they spent their idle time.

Age matters because a battery slowly loses a little capacity just sitting on a shelf, even unused. A unit that's only a year or two old has aged less than one that's been around a good while, all else equal.

Storage matters just as much. A battery that sat dead-empty for a long stretch, or baked in a hot attic or a summer garage, has had a harder life than one kept around half-charged in a cool, dry closet and topped up now and then. So ask plainly: how old is it, and where and how has it been kept?

✓ The kindest life for a battery

The best-cared-for used units were stored cool, dry, and around half full, and topped up every few months. If a seller describes something like that, it's a good sign the battery was treated well.

Ask what kind of battery is inside

Not all lithium batteries are the same, and the type inside a used station tells you a lot about how much life it likely has left.

The newer, better kind is LiFePO_4 , often written LFP — lithium iron phosphate. It's rated for far more cycles, it's very stable and safe, and it handles age and being kept full better than the older type. On the used market, an LFP unit generally has more life ahead of it for the same amount of use.

The older kind is a plain lithium-ion battery, like the ones in laptops — lighter, but with fewer cycles in it and more common in older or cheaper units. It can still be a fine buy if the price and the cycle count match, but go in knowing it won't last as many years as LFP. Our battery-chemistry guide compares the two in plain terms.

✓ For something you'll lean on, favor LFP

If the used station is going to be your backup for years, an LFP unit is usually the smarter buy even at a bit more money. For an occasional, light-duty helper, older lithium may suit you just fine.

Give it a good looking-over

Before you plug anything in, use your eyes and your hands. A careful once-over catches the problems that matter most.

- **Swelling or bulging:** the most important check. A case that looks puffed, warped, or won't sit flat is a hard no — more on that shortly.
- **Cracks and hard knocks:** a cracked case or signs of a bad drop can mean hidden damage inside.
- **Water marks or corrosion:** rust, mineral stains, or a musty smell hint it got wet, which a battery does not forgive.
- **The ports and outlets:** look for bent pins, scorching, or loose-feeling sockets.
- **The fan:** when it runs, a healthy fan hums; a grinding or rattling fan is a worn part.

! A swollen battery is a stop sign

If a power station looks swollen or bulged in any way, do not buy it, do not plug it in, and don't let the seller plug it in beside you. A swollen lithium battery is a genuine hazard. Thank them and leave.

Test it before any money changes hands

This is the step people skip and regret. A few minutes of hands-on testing tells you more than any description ever could.

Ask to see it powered on and, ideally, part-charged so you can watch it both take a charge and give one back. Plug the wall charger in and confirm the charge level climbs. Then plug a lamp or a fan into the AC outlets and make sure they actually run — remember there's often a separate on-off button for the AC side.

If you can, let it charge a little and then run something modest off it for a few minutes, watching that the battery level behaves sensibly and doesn't plunge all at once. A healthy unit charges steadily, powers your test device without complaint, and doesn't get alarmingly hot or noisy.

★ I'll come test it with you

If you've found a used station and you're not sure how to check it, that's a perfect remote or in-home job for me. We'll run it through its paces together before you decide. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

The warranty usually doesn't come with it

One quiet downside of buying used: the maker's warranty often doesn't transfer to a second owner. It's worth knowing before you buy.

Most warranties cover the original purchaser only, and many are tied to the receipt and the date of that first sale. So a used unit is often on its own — if the battery fails a year in, there may be no free repair or replacement to fall back on. That's part of what you're weighing when you trade a lower price for unknown history.

It's still worth asking. Now and then a warranty does transfer, or there's meaningful time left on it, and the seller may have the original receipt. If so, that's a real point in the deal's favor — get it in writing and keep the paperwork.

✓ Ask, but assume none

Plan your decision as if there's no warranty, since usually there isn't. If it turns out some coverage carries over, treat that as a happy bonus, not the thing you were counting on.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

Where you live, and how much you'll lean on the station, should shape how much risk a used one is worth. A light-duty helper in town is a different bet from a lifeline out in the country.

If you live in town or the suburbs

Close to town, outages tend to be shorter and your city water keeps flowing whether the power's on or not. If a used station is just for light backup — phones, the internet, a lamp, a fan for a few hours — a healthy one at a fair price can be a perfectly sensible buy.

- For occasional, low-stakes use, a gently-used unit with a low cycle count can save you real money.
- You're not betting your safety on it, so a bit of unknown battery life is easier to live with.
- Still do the checks — cycle count, a look-over, and a quick test — so you know what you're getting.
- In an apartment or condo where a generator isn't allowed, even a used station beats no backup at all, as long as it's sound.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country the stakes climb. Outages run longer, and when the power quits your well pump quits too — no water for drinking, cooking, flushing, or the animals. If you'll truly depend on the station, its battery health matters a great deal more.

- For a unit you'll rely on in real emergencies, weigh new more heavily — known battery, full warranty, no guessing.
- The same honest limit holds no matter how you buy it: most well pumps are 240-volt, and a portable station, new or used, won't run one.
- If someone in the house depends on a powered medical device, I'd lean toward new for that job and save any used unit for lighter duty.
- Store drinking water for the outage regardless, and lean on solar to refill through a long rural stretch.

★ On a well, or counting on it for medical needs?

Those are the times I'll often steer you toward new, and help you skip a used gamble on something you truly can't afford to have fail. Let's talk it through — call (330) 200-8042.

Where used units come from

It helps to know why a station is on the used market. Some reasons are perfectly good; one or two deserve a second look.

Plenty of used stations come from folks who simply upgraded to a bigger one, or bought for a trip they no longer take, or are settling an estate. Those often turn out to be lightly used and well kept. A store return, sold on at a discount, can also be fine — just ask why it came back.

The one to be a little wary of is the unit that 'sat in the closet for years.' Sitting isn't automatically bad, but a battery left dead-empty or baking for a long time can be quietly worn even with a low cycle count. So when you hear 'barely used, sat for years,' let that be a cue to test more carefully, not less.

✓ A friendly question opens the door

Just asking 'why are you selling it?' tells you a lot — and an honest, relaxed answer is reassuring all on its own. Sellers who tell you the whole story are usually the ones worth buying from.

Is the price actually a bargain?

A used station only saves you money if the savings outweigh the unknowns. Here's how to think it through without chasing dollar figures.

The honest way to judge a used price is to weigh what you save against what you can't be sure of: the battery's remaining life and the missing warranty. A small discount on an old, high-cycle, out-of-warranty unit isn't really a deal. A meaningful discount on a young, low-cycle, well-stored LFP unit that tests well can be a fine one.

I keep dollar amounts out of these guides on purpose, because prices shift and every unit is different. What travels is the principle: the more unknown the battery's health, the bigger the discount has to be before it's worth the gamble. If the price is close to new, buy new.

✓ The rule that always holds

Ask yourself: if this battery turns out to be half-worn, would the price still feel fair? If yes, it's a reasonable risk. If no, keep looking or buy new.

Red flags that mean walk away

Most used buys are fine. But a few warning signs mean the deal isn't worth any price — learn them and trust them.

- **It won't power on at all**, even after the seller tries to charge it — and they can't clearly explain why.
- **It won't hold a charge**, dropping fast or dying under a light load.
- **The seller won't let you test it**, or wants payment before you can see it run.
- **Any swelling or bulging**, a burning or chemical smell, or scorched outlets.
- **A story that keeps changing** about the age, the cycles, or how it was used.

! When in doubt, keep your money

A swollen battery, a unit that won't hold a charge, or a seller who won't let you test are all clear signals to walk away. There will always be another used station; there's only one you. No bargain is worth a hazard.

Used solar panels and expansion packs, too

Stations aren't the only thing sold secondhand. Panels and add-on battery packs show up used as well, with their own things to check.

Used solar panels are often a safe buy, since panels are simple and rugged — just look for cracked glass, damaged connectors, or a bent frame, and make sure the connector type and voltage match your station's input. Our solar-panels guide covers matching panels safely.

Add-on expansion battery packs are trickier. They must be the same maker's compatible pack for your exact station, and being batteries themselves, they carry the same hidden-wear question as the station. Check the pack's age and condition just as carefully, and confirm compatibility before you buy. Our expansion-battery guide explains how those packs fit.

✓ Match before you buy an add-on

An expansion pack that doesn't fit your model is just a heavy paperweight. Confirm the exact compatibility — maker and model — before any money changes hands, and test it the same way you'd test a station.

A used-buying checklist

Take this list along — or a photo of it on your phone — when you go to look at a used station. Work down it before you decide.

- ☐ Asked the cycle count and seen it on the screen or app.
- ☐ Asked the age and how it was stored.
- ☐ Confirmed the battery type, and favored LFP for anything I'll rely on.
- ☐ Looked it over for swelling, cracks, water marks, and damaged ports.
- ☐ Watched it charge, and powered a lamp or fan off the AC outlets.
- ☐ Asked about the warranty and why they're selling.

✓ If a line can't be checked, lower your offer

Every box you can't tick is an unknown, and unknowns are worth a discount. The more you can't verify, the less you should be willing to pay — or the more you should just walk.

When new is worth the extra money

Used isn't always the right call. For some jobs, the certainty of new is worth every dollar.

If the station is something you'll truly rely on — backup you'd count on in a real emergency, or power for a device someone's health depends on — then a known-good battery and a full warranty are worth paying for. That's not the place to gamble on unseen wear.

New also makes sense if you'll use it hard and often, where a tired battery would let you down sooner, or if you simply won't have a good way to test a used one before buying. Peace of mind is a real feature, and sometimes it's the one that matters most.

★ Let's weigh it honestly together

I'll never push you toward new just to spend more, and I'll never wave you into a used gamble on something you can't afford to have fail. Tell me how you'll use it and I'll give you my straight read. (330) 200-8042.

Common mistakes buying used

A few avoidable slip-ups account for most used-station regret. Now you'll know them in advance.

- **Paying before testing.** Money first, look later is how people end up with a dead battery.
- **Ignoring the cycle count.** A low price on a high-cycle unit is no bargain at all.
- **Overlooking swelling.** A puffed case is a safety issue, not a cosmetic one.
- **Assuming the warranty carries over.** It usually doesn't — plan as if there's none.
- **Buying used for a job that needs certainty,** like medical backup, where new is the wiser choice.

! The regret I hear about most

It's almost always the same: 'I paid first, and it won't hold a charge.' Test before you pay, every single time. A seller who won't allow that has told you everything you need to know.

A myth, cleared up

There are two opposite myths about used batteries, and the truth sits squarely in the middle.

Q: 'Used batteries are always fine — a battery's a battery.'

Not so. Batteries wear with age and use, and a hard-used or badly stored one really can be worn out. That's exactly why you check the cycle count, the age, and how it holds a charge.

Q: 'Used batteries are always junk — never buy one.'

Also not so. A young, low-cycle, well-stored LFP unit that tests well can have years of good life left and save you real money. The truth is it depends — on that specific battery's history.

Q: 'A low price means it must be a good deal.'

Only if the battery is sound. A cheap price on a worn or swollen unit is expensive in the end. Judge the battery first, the price second.

✓ It depends — so check

The honest answer to 'is used okay?' is always 'it depends on this one.' That's not a dodge — it's the whole reason to do the few simple checks in this guide.

Questions to ask the seller

Bring these plain questions along. The answers — and how freely they're given — tell you nearly everything.

- What's the cycle count, and can you show it to me on the screen or app?
- How old is it, and where and how has it been stored?
- What kind of battery is inside — LFP, or older lithium?
- May I watch it charge and power a lamp before I decide?
- Do you have the original receipt, and does any warranty remain?
- Why are you selling it?

★ We can go look together

If you'd like a second set of eyes and a friendly hand at the meeting, that's just the sort of thing I do. Bring me along, in person or on a video call, and we'll size it up together. Call (330) 200-8042.

Making the final call

You've asked, looked, and tested. Here's how to put it all together into a yes, a no, or a lower offer.

If it's young, low on cycles, well stored, tests cleanly, and the price reflects a real savings over new, that's a fair buy — enjoy it. If the history is murky or the cycles are high, either negotiate the price down to match the risk or simply pass; there's always another unit.

And if anything set off a true red flag — swelling, a unit that won't hold a charge, a seller who won't let you test — the decision is already made. Walk away without a second thought. Trusting those signals is how you stay both safe and satisfied.

✓ Sleep on a maybe

If you're on the fence, you're allowed to say 'let me think about it.' A fair seller won't mind, and a night's thought often makes a murky deal clear. Pressure to decide on the spot is itself a small red flag.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from folks considering a used power station, answered plainly.

Q: How can I tell how much life a used battery has left?

You can't see it directly, so you gather clues: the cycle count (often on the screen or app), the age, how it was stored, and a hands-on test of whether it holds a charge. Together those paint a fair picture.

Q: What's the most important thing to check?

Two things tie for first: that it isn't swollen or damaged, and that it actually holds a charge and powers your test device. A swollen unit is a walk-away no matter how good the price.

Q: Is a used one safe to use indoors like a new one?

A sound used unit is just as safe indoors — it's still a battery with no fumes. But a swollen or damaged battery is a hazard, which is why the look-over matters so much before you ever plug it in.

Q: Should I just buy new instead?

For light, occasional backup, a healthy used unit can be a smart savings. For medical needs or emergency backup you'll truly rely on, the certainty of new — known battery, full warranty — is usually worth it.

★ Still have a question?

That's what I'm here for, and there's never a silly one. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll give you a straight, friendly answer before you buy.

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 buying a used power station 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.

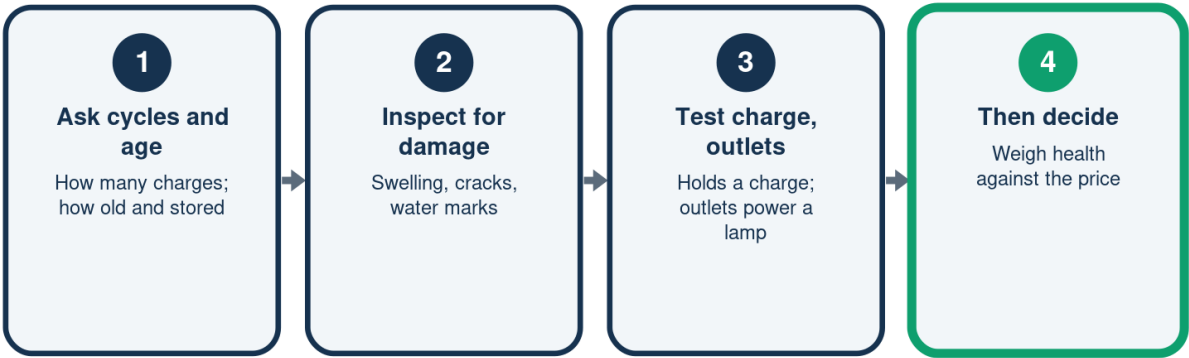
When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do licensed electrical work myself — for anything that needs to be wired into your home, I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

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Check a Used Unit in Four Steps

A little homework before you pay



Ask, look, test, then decide; never pay before you check.

Green Lights vs. Red Flags

What to welcome, and what should stop you

	Green light	Red flag
Cycle count	Low, shown	High or hidden
The case	Clean, solid	Swollen, cracked
Charging	Holds a charge	Won't hold one
Outlets	Power a lamp	Dead outlets
The seller	Will demo it	Won't demo it

Green lights invite a fair offer; a red flag means walk away.

New vs. Used

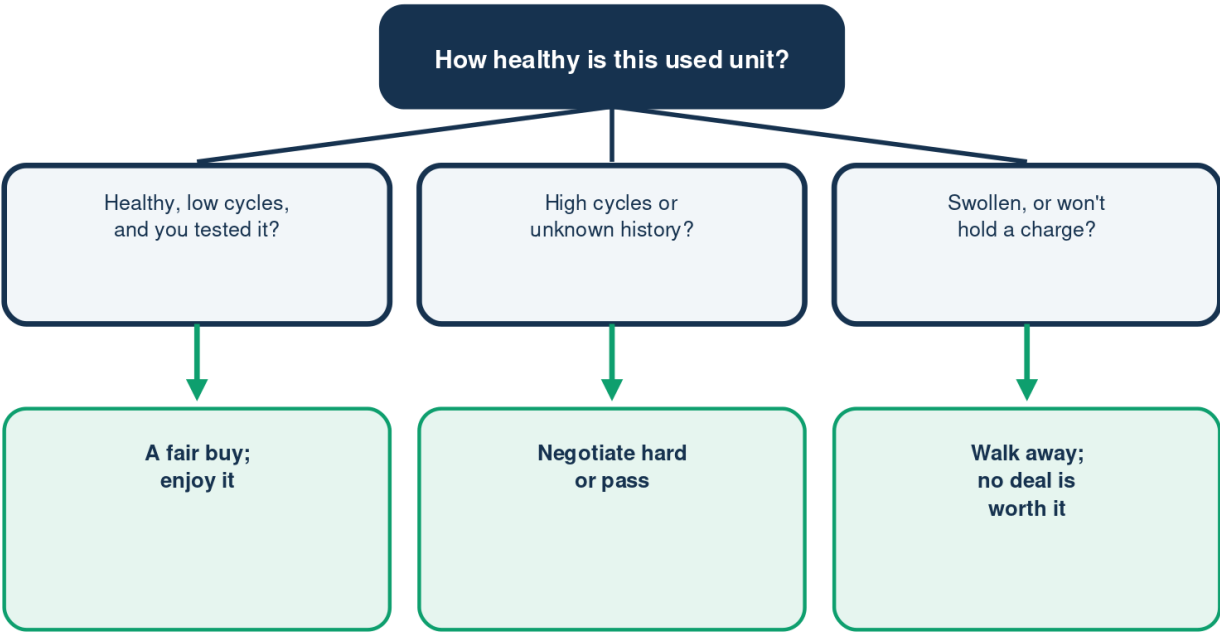
What you trade when you buy secondhand

	New	Used
Warranty	Yes	Often no
Battery health	Known	Unknown
Price	More	Less
Cycles used	Zero	Some, unseen
Best for	Medical, daily	Light backup

Used can save money; new buys certainty for what you rely on.

Should I Buy This Used One?

Let the battery's health decide



A swollen or won't-charge battery is never a bargain; walk away.

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.

— *Bill*



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