



An Extended Guide · No. 1300

Maintenance and the Weekly Test

Keeping your standby
ready for the next outage

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

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! Read this first — carbon monoxide is still the real danger

A standby generator runs on an engine, and engine exhaust contains carbon monoxide — an invisible, odorless gas that can kill. Your installer sets the unit outdoors and spaces it away from windows, doors, and vents to meet the maker's instructions and local code, which is a big part of what keeps you safe. Your job is to keep it that way: never let anyone box it in, build a structure around it, or let snow, leaves, or drifts pile up against it, and never move it closer to the house. Put battery-backup carbon-monoxide alarms on every floor and outside the bedrooms, and test them — the safety agencies urge this for every home. If an alarm sounds, or anyone feels dizzy, sick, or sleepy, get everyone into fresh air first and ask questions later. Good maintenance keeps the engine running clean, but nothing on the service list changes the one rule that protects you: the unit stays outdoors where your pro set it, never boxed in or crowded, so its exhaust always has somewhere safe to go.

Keeping it ready for the day you need it

A standby generator spends almost all its life waiting — and the only way to be sure it'll work on the worst night of the year is a little regular, unglamorous care between outages. The good news is that it's simple, and much of it the machine does for you.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. I've spent 30+ years helping folks feel comfortable with the equipment in their homes. This guide is me at your kitchen table, laying out the care a standby needs — what you can watch yourself, and what to leave to a pro.

You won't find invented numbers here — no oil quantities, no hour counts. Those live in your unit's manual, and that's exactly where they belong. What I can give you is the rhythm of it, in plain English, so none of it feels like a mystery.

★ Not sure what your unit needs?

Every unit's schedule is a little different. If you'd like a hand setting up a simple routine you'll actually keep, call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or bring me your manual on a visit and we'll go through it together.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, your standby will be ready when you need it.

- ❑ It runs a brief self-test on its own — commonly about once a week — to keep the engine ready and the battery charged. That's normal.
- ❑ Beyond that, it needs routine care like a car: oil and filter, air filter, spark plug, and the battery, on the maker's schedule.
- ❑ Follow your manual for the intervals and the oil — not a chart, a neighbor's habit, or a number off the internet.
- ❑ The starting battery is the usual wear item and a common reason a standby won't start — check and replace it on schedule.
- ❑ Keep the area around and above the unit clear of leaves, snow, drifts, and nests, all year.
- ❑ You can watch, listen, and keep it clear; leave oil, filters, the spark plug, and anything electrical or gas to a pro.

✓ The one-sentence version

A standby mostly maintains its own readiness with a weekly self-test — your part is keeping it clear, watching the battery, and letting a pro handle the tune-up on the maker's schedule.

Why a little care beats an emergency scramble

The standby units that let people down are almost never the ones that were looked after.

A tired battery nobody checked, oil that went too long, an air intake packed with leaves — these are the quiet, common reasons a generator won't answer the call on the one night it's truly needed. None of them happen overnight, and none are hard to prevent.

The care in this guide takes very little of your time, spread across the year, and much of it is simply letting the unit do its weekly test and keeping an eye on things. Compare that to a cold, dark house during the storm you bought the generator for, and the math is easy.

✓ Think of it like a car

You wouldn't skip oil changes for years and expect a car to start reliably. A standby's engine is no different — it just runs far less often, which makes it easier to forget it's there at all.

The weekly self-test — and why you want to hear it

If you've heard your generator run for a few minutes when the power was perfectly fine, that's its self-test, sometimes called the exercise cycle. It's a feature, not a fault.

On a schedule set in its controller — commonly about once a week — the unit starts itself, runs the engine briefly, and shuts back down. Those few minutes keep the moving parts lubricated, keep seals and fuel paths in good shape, and keep the starting battery charged, so the whole system stays genuinely ready rather than just sitting.

You can usually adjust the day and time so the test lands at a considerate daytime hour rather than early morning — worth doing for your own peace and your neighbors'. Our noise-and-neighbors guide covers that side of it.

✓ Hearing it is a good sign

A standby that tests itself each week is a standby proving it's ready. If you ever notice the weekly run stops happening, that's worth a call — silence can be the real warning, not the sound.

The starting battery: the usual weak link

If a standby is going to disappoint someone, the battery is the most likely culprit — so it's worth understanding a little.

Just like the battery in a car, a generator's starting battery is a wear item: it slowly loses its strength over the years, whether it's used or not. When an outage hits, that battery is what cranks the engine to life — and a weak one is the single most common reason a standby fails to start when it's finally needed.

The unit generally keeps the battery topped up between runs, and the weekly self-test helps too. But no battery lasts forever, so it needs checking and, on the maker's schedule, replacing before it fails. Cold is especially hard on batteries; our cold-weather guide covers that.

★ The cheapest insurance there is

A fresh battery is an inexpensive part next to the peace of mind it buys. If yours is getting on in years — especially heading into winter — don't wait for it to quit. I'm glad to help you plan a replacement with your service pro. Call (330) 200-8042.

Oil and the oil filter

Like any engine, a standby's needs clean oil to live a long life — and this is squarely a job to do on schedule, by the book.

On the maker's schedule — measured in running hours, on the calendar, or whichever comes first — the oil and filter get changed to keep the engine protected. I won't quote you an interval or an oil grade, because those vary by model and belong to your manual. Treat the manual as the real answer, not a rule of thumb.

For most owners, the oil and filter change is best left to a service pro, often as part of an annual visit — both because it's fiddly and because a standby must be shut down safely first so it can't start itself mid-task. A capable owner who follows the manual's shutdown steps can do it, but there's no shame at all in leaving it to a pro.

✓ Let the manual set the number

Whenever you read a specific interval or oil type somewhere, check it against your own manual before acting on it. The right numbers for your unit are printed there, tuned to that engine.

The air filter and the spark plug

Two small, inexpensive parts that quietly keep the engine breathing and firing the way it should.

The air filter keeps dust and debris out of the engine as it draws in air to burn fuel; a clogged one can make it run rough or hard to start. The spark plug ignites that fuel, and a worn or fouled plug is a common, simple cause of rough running. Both get checked and replaced on the maker's schedule.

These often fall on the same service visit as the oil change, which makes them easy to keep track of. Your manual specifies the right parts and how often to look at them — another reason a routine service plan keeps things simple.

✓ Bundle the tune-up

Because oil, filter, air filter, and spark plug tend to share a schedule, having them done together in one service visit is the tidy way to stay on top of all of them at once.

Keep the area around it clear

This is the easiest bit of maintenance, the one you can do yourself in a minute, and one of the most important for both readiness and safety.

The unit needs clear air around and above it to run cool and to vent its exhaust safely. So keep leaves, snow, drifts, tall grass, mulch, and stored odds and ends away from it, and never let anyone build a deck, cover, or enclosure over or around it. After a storm, clearing snow and debris off the unit is a real part of keeping it ready.

This is where maintenance and carbon-monoxide safety meet: a unit that's crowded or buried can't breathe or vent properly. Keeping its clearances open — the ones your installer set — protects the engine and the household both. Our placement guide explains what those clearances are for.

! Never let it get boxed in

No structure over it, nothing stacked against it, and no snow or leaves left to pile up. Clear space isn't just about cooling — it's how the exhaust, and its carbon monoxide, stays safely away from the house.

What you can do, and what a pro should

A clear split keeps things safe and simple — here's the honest line between owner care and pro service.

- **Yours:** listen for the weekly self-test, glance at the controller's status light, and keep the area clear all year.
- **Yours:** note the battery's age and watch for a unit that stops testing or shows a fault — then make the call.
- **The pro's:** the oil and filter, air filter, spark plug, and any deeper engine service, on the maker's schedule.
- **The pro's:** anything on the electrical or gas side, and a full load test that proves it carries your home.

! It can start itself — respect that

A standby can crank up for its self-test or an outage at any moment. Before anyone works on it hands-on, it must be shut down and kept from starting, following the manual's steps — which is a big reason the hands-on care is best left to a pro.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

The maintenance is the same everywhere, but how hard the unit works — and how much a missed step costs you — depends a lot on where you live.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, outages tend to be shorter and less frequent, which means the unit runs mostly for its weekly self-test. Because city water keeps flowing without power, the care here is about food, heat, and comfort staying ready rather than a pump.

- The weekly self-test does most of the work of keeping a rarely-used unit ready — let it run and listen for it.
- Set the test for a considerate daytime hour, since close neighbors will hear it too.
- An annual service visit is usually plenty for a unit that mostly exercises itself.
- Watch the battery's age especially — a unit that seldom runs for real still leans on that battery when it finally must.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country the unit often works harder and matters more urgently, so falling behind on care is a bigger risk — because when the power quits, the well pump quits with it, and no electricity means no water.

- Longer, more frequent rural outages put more real running hours on the engine, so the maker's hour-based service may come due sooner.
- Have your pro load-test it in a way that includes the well pump, so you know the whole system still carries water — see our well-pump guide.
- Keep the battery fresh and serviced heading into storm season and winter, when you're most likely to need it.
- Keep the area clear of the deeper snow and drifts a rural, open lot can gather around the unit.

★ Let's build a routine that fits your life

Whether your standby mostly just tests itself or works hard through country storms, I can help you set a simple, realistic care schedule and line up a service pro you trust. Call (330) 200-8042.

The annual service and service plans

Most of the hands-on care above tends to gather into one yearly visit — and many owners never track it themselves at all.

A routine service visit generally covers the oil and filter, the air filter and spark plug, a battery check, and a once-over of the whole unit with a load test to confirm it's ready. Plenty of owners keep an annual service plan with their installer so this simply happens on schedule, without them having to remember.

A service plan can also help keep your manufacturer's warranty valid, since professional service is often part of the deal. The ins and outs of plans, coverage, and keeping the warranty intact live in our warranty-and-service guide, so we won't duplicate them here.

✓ A plan turns care into autopilot

If remembering schedules isn't your idea of fun, a service plan is the easy button — the pro comes on time, does the tune-up, and you stay ready without lifting a wrench.

Follow the manual, not a chart

If there's one habit that keeps a standby healthy, it's letting your unit's own manual set the numbers.

Intervals, oil type, the spark plug, the schedule — all of it is tuned to your specific engine, and the maker prints the right answers in the manual. A number that's perfect for one unit can be wrong for another, which is exactly why I keep pointing you back to yours instead of quoting figures.

Keep the manual somewhere you'll find it, register your unit if you haven't, and jot down what was done and when. That little record turns 'has it been a while?' into a plain, honest answer any time you or your pro needs one.

✓ **Lost the manual? It's usually a click away**

If your paper manual has wandered off, the maker almost always posts it online. If you'd like help finding the right one and marking the pages that matter, that's a quick thing I can do with you.

After it's carried you through an outage

When a standby has actually done its job for a long stretch, a little follow-up keeps it ready for the next time.

After it switches your home back to utility power, the unit cools itself down and shuts off on its own — you don't do a thing in the moment. But once the dust settles, it's worth noting how long it ran and whether the controller logged any faults, and scheduling a service check if it ran hard for days.

This is also a good moment to clear away any storm debris around the unit and to think about the battery, which just did real work. Our storm-readiness guide turns the before, during, and after of an outage into a simple game plan.

✓ A long run earns a checkup

Just like a car after a long road trip, a standby that ran for days has earned a look. A quick service afterward keeps a hard-working unit from quietly falling behind.

Staying safe around the unit

A few safety truths are worth holding onto for as long as you own a standby — they never change.

The unit can start itself at any time, so hands-on work always begins with the maker's shutdown steps to keep it from cranking. Never add oil to a hot engine, keep the electrical and gas connections strictly in licensed-pro hands, and remember that the whole point of its outdoor spot is to keep exhaust away from the house.

And keep your carbon-monoxide alarms tested — battery-backup alarms on every level and outside the bedrooms, which the safety agency CPSC urges for every home. A well-maintained unit vents safely outdoors, and tested alarms are your backstop no matter what.

! Shut it down before you touch it

Before any hands-on service, follow the manual to shut the unit off and keep it from auto-starting — and leave anything involving the wiring or the gas line to a licensed pro. When in doubt, don't; call instead.

Signs it's asking for attention

Most care is routine, but it helps to know what a standby looks and sounds like when it wants a pro's eyes.

- The weekly self-test stops happening, or the run sounds rough or uneven compared to usual.
- A warning or fault light on the controller, or an alert in the app if you have monitoring.
- It cranks slowly or struggles to start — often the battery, and worth acting on before an outage.
- New smoke, a new noise, or oil that looks low or dark on a pro's check.

✓ Notice, then call — don't tinker

Your job with these signs is to spot them and pick up the phone, not to diagnose or repair. A service pro sorts out the cause; you just have to catch it early.

A few myths, cleared up

Some common beliefs about standby maintenance just aren't so. Let's clear the air.

- **'Install it and forget it.'** It needs its weekly test and routine service to stay ready. A neglected unit can let you down on the one night you need it.
- **'The weekly noise means something's wrong.'** The opposite — that's the self-test keeping it ready. Silence when you'd expect a test is the real warning.
- **'It runs on natural gas, so there's no maintenance.'** The fuel supply and the engine are different things — the engine still needs oil, filters, and a healthy battery.
- **'The battery will last as long as the generator.'** It won't — the starting battery is a wear item that needs replacing on schedule, well before the unit itself is done.

✓ When in doubt, ask a plain question

There's no silly question about upkeep. If an answer leaves you more confused, ask again — or ask me. Clear beats clever every time.

Keeping records simple

You don't need anything fancy — just somewhere consistent to jot down what was done and when.

A small notebook kept with the manual, a note on your phone, or a card taped inside a cabinet all work. The point isn't the format; it's having an honest record so you're never guessing whether a service is overdue or how old the battery is.

- The date of each service visit and what was done.
- When the battery was last replaced — the number one thing to track.
- Any faults the controller or app showed, and how they were resolved.
- How long the unit ran during any real outage.

✓ Start the log today, even years in

If your standby's been running a while without a record, don't fret about the gap — just start logging from now. A record that begins today beats no record at all.

Questions worth asking about service

Whether you're talking to your installer, a service pro, or to me, these get you to a maintenance plan you actually understand.

Q: What's the service schedule for my specific unit?

So you know what's due and when, straight from your model's manual rather than a general rule. Ask them to point you to the pages that matter.

Q: Do you offer an annual service plan, and what does it cover?

A plan keeps care on autopilot and can help keep the warranty valid. Ask what's included and how it's scheduled — our warranty-and-service guide covers the details.

Q: How old is my battery, and when should I plan to replace it?

Since the battery is the usual weak link, get a straight answer on its age and a target for replacing it — ideally before a winter.

Q: Can you load-test it so I know it carries my home?

A load test proves the unit can actually run what you need, not just start. Especially worth it on a well, where the pump is a big load.

✓ There's no silly question

If a pro makes you feel rushed or foolish for asking about upkeep, that's a reason to keep looking, not to sign. A good one welcomes plain questions.

What I do, and what I leave to the pros

Worth saying plainly, because it's the honest shape of how I can help with upkeep.

- **What I help with:** understanding your unit's self-test, setting up a simple care routine and reminders, finding your manual, and lining up a service pro I trust.
- **What only a service pro does:** the oil and filter, air filter, spark plug, deeper engine work, and a proper load test.
- **What I never do:** electrical or gas work of any kind — that's not my license, and your safety deserves the real thing.

★ I can set up the reminders with you

If the hardest part of upkeep is just remembering, I can help you set up calendar reminders, monitoring alerts, and a service plan so it all runs itself. Reach me at (330) 200-8042 — and for that kind of setup, I can often help right on your screen for \$49.

A simple owner's routine

Here's the whole rhythm on one page — most of it just watching and keeping clear, with the hands-on work left to a pro.

- ❑ Each week: let the self-test run, and listen for it — silence is the warning, not the sound.
- ❑ Now and then: glance at the controller's status, and clear leaves, snow, or debris from around and above the unit.
- ❑ Each season: eyeball the unit for anything obviously off, and note the battery's age.
- ❑ Before winter and storm season: have the battery checked, and confirm the area stays clear of drifts.
- ❑ Yearly: a pro service for oil, filters, the spark plug, the battery, and a load test.
- ❑ Any time it faults, stops testing, or struggles to start: call your service pro — don't tinker.

★ Make it second nature

The more of this becomes routine, the less you'll think about it. If you'd like a hand building the habit, I'm glad to walk through it with you on a visit. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The maintenance questions I hear most about standby generators, answered plainly.

Q: Why does my generator run by itself once a week?

That's the self-test, or exercise cycle. It runs the engine briefly to keep it lubricated and ready and to keep the battery charged. It's normal and a good sign — and you can usually set the day and time.

Q: What maintenance does a standby actually need?

Routine care much like a car: oil and filter, air filter, spark plug, and the battery, on the maker's schedule. Follow your manual for the intervals and the oil, and let a pro handle the hands-on work.

Q: What's the most common reason a standby won't start?

The starting battery. It's a wear item that fades over the years, so it's worth checking and replacing on schedule — especially before winter, when cold is hardest on it.

Q: Can I do the maintenance myself?

You can keep the area clear, listen for the weekly test, and track the battery's age. The oil, filters, spark plug, and anything electrical or gas are best left to a pro — and the unit can start itself, so it must be shut down safely first.

Q: Do I need a service plan?

You don't have to have one, but many owners keep an annual plan so care happens on schedule without them tracking it — and it can help keep the warranty valid. Our warranty-and-service guide has the details.

★ Maintenance questions are always welcome

There's no such thing as a silly upkeep question — I'd much rather you call and ask than skip a step and find out the hard way. Reach me at (330) 200-8042.

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 maintaining your standby generator 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 Maintenance Rhythm

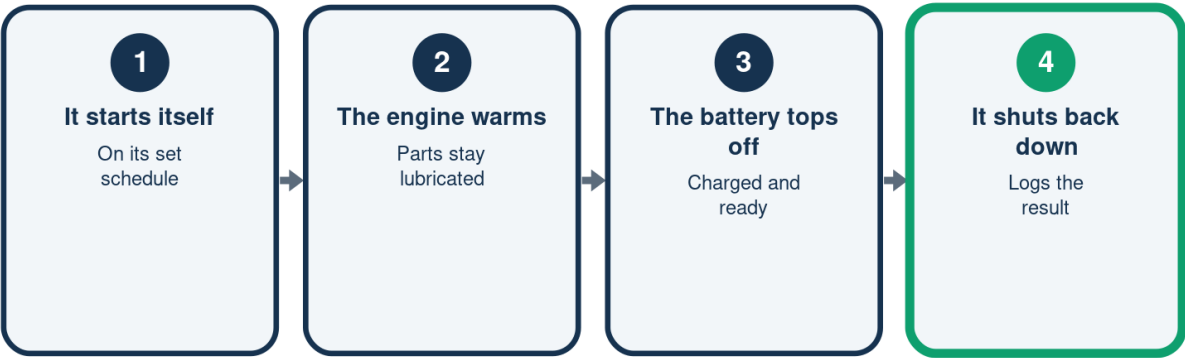
A little watching, and a yearly tune-up

	How often	What happens
Weekly	Self-test runs	on its own
Now and then	You clear it	and look
Per the manual	Oil, filter,	plug — a pro
Yearly	A pro service	and load test

Follow your unit's manual for the exact intervals.

What the Weekly Self-Test Does

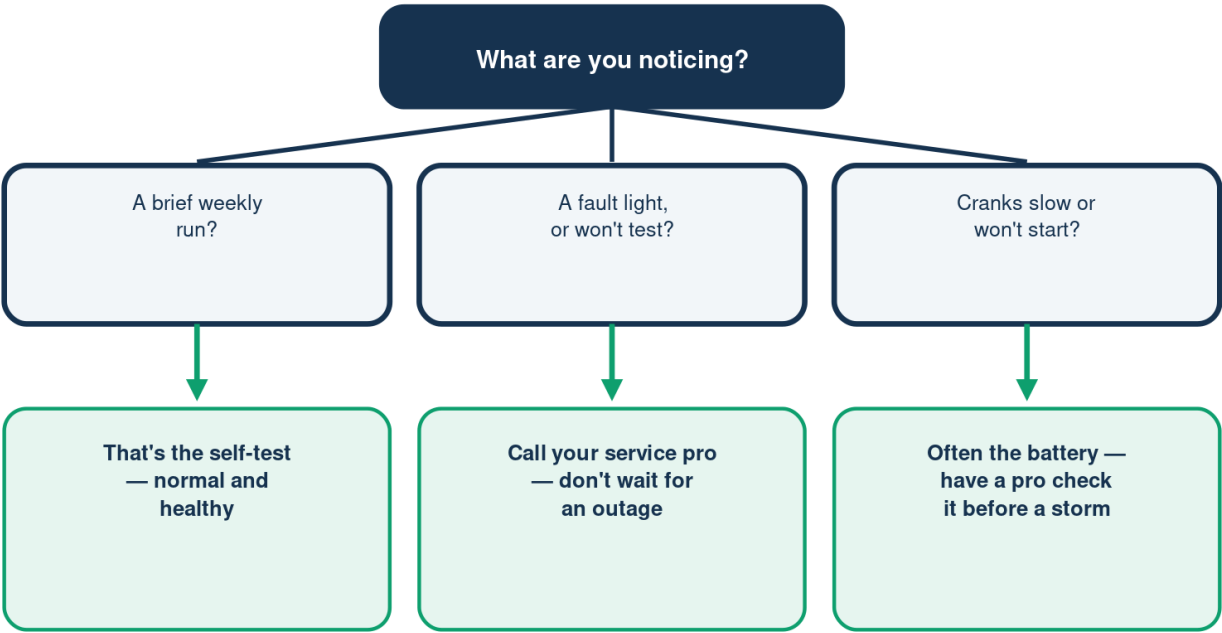
A few minutes that keep it ready



You'll hear it — that's normal, and a good sign.

Normal, or Time to Call?

Telling a healthy standby from one that needs a pro



It can start itself — follow the manual's shutdown before any hands-on work.

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

Owner Checks vs. Pro Service

A clear, safe split of the work

	You can do	A pro should do
Watch and listen	The weekly test	Load-test it
The area	Keep it clear	Check clearances
The battery	Note its age	Test and replace
Oil, filter, plug	Leave it	Service it
Wiring and gas	Never touch	All of it

When in doubt, it's a pro's job — the unit can auto-start.



Need a Real Person?

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You just have to remember you can call.
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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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