



An Extended Guide · No. 1294

Natural Gas vs. Propane

Choosing the right
fuel for your standby

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

BillsHomeTech.com · (330) 200-8042 · Atwater, Ohio

Free & printable — share it with someone who needs it



Book a visit —
billshometech.com/book

! 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. Both fuels burn cleanly, but any engine's exhaust still carries carbon monoxide — which is why your unit runs outdoors, at the spacing a pro set, no matter which fuel you choose.

Choosing the right fuel for your standby

A standby generator runs on one of two fuels: natural gas piped in from the utility, or propane from a tank on your property. Both are proven and both work beautifully — the right one for you usually comes down to what your home already has and where you live.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. I've spent 30+ years helping folks make comfortable, unhurried decisions about the equipment in their homes. This guide is me at your kitchen table, laying the two fuels side by side in plain English — no brand names, no invented numbers.

We'll compare how each fuel behaves, what your gas pro has to check, and how to choose. The actual work of running a gas line or setting a tank is its own topic — our gas-line guide covers that — and the fine points of propane in deep cold live in our cold-weather guide.

★ There's nothing to sell you here

I don't sell generators or fuel and I earn no commission, so this is just honest advice. If you'd like help weighing natural gas against propane for your home, call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you already understand the fuel choice.

- ❑ Natural gas is piped in from the utility — it usually keeps flowing on its own during an outage, with nothing to refill.
- ❑ Propane comes from a tank on your property — it stores for years and works anywhere, but the tank is finite, so refills matter.
- ❑ Your gas pro must confirm your gas meter and line can actually supply the unit; a big unit or a long run may need an upgrade.
- ❑ For propane, the tank size and a refill plan are the things to get right — and extreme cold is handled by proper tank sizing.
- ❑ Many units run on either fuel, and the installer sets which one — so you're not locked in forever.
- ❑ The best fuel is usually the one your home is already set up for.

✓ The one-sentence version

If you already have natural gas, it's usually the simplest choice; if you don't, propane lets you have a standby anywhere — and both are dependable when your pro sizes them right.

The two fuels, side by side

Before we go deep, here's each fuel in a nutshell so the rest of the guide makes sense.

Natural gas

The same gas that may already heat your home, piped in from the utility. Its great strength is a supply that keeps flowing on its own during most outages — there's no tank to watch and nothing to refill. It's only an option where a gas main reaches your street.

Propane

A liquefied gas kept in a tank on your property, sometimes called LP. It stores for years without going stale, burns clean, and is available anywhere — no gas main required. The trade-off is that the tank holds a finite amount, so its size and your refill plan matter.

✓ Neither is 'better' in general

One isn't superior to the other — they simply fit different homes. The rest of this guide is about matching the fuel to your house, not crowning a winner.

Natural gas, up close

If a gas main serves your neighborhood, natural gas is often the easiest fuel to live with. Here's why.

The generator taps the same utility gas that may already run your furnace, water heater, or range. During an outage, that gas typically keeps flowing, because the gas system doesn't depend on your home's electricity. So your runtime isn't something you have to ration — the generator can run as long as the power is out.

There's no tank on your property, nothing to refill, and no gauge to watch. For many in-town and suburban homes, that hands-off supply is the whole appeal, and it's why natural gas is such a popular choice where it's available.

The one catch is capacity, and that's not something you can eyeball — it's the very thing your gas pro checks before anything is installed. We'll cover that on the next page.

✓ Continuous, but not literally unlimited

Natural gas keeps flowing in the vast majority of outages, which is a real advantage — but no fuel or machine is truly unlimited. It's dependable, and that's the honest way to say it.

What your gas pro checks on natural gas

A gas line that heats your home isn't automatically big enough to also run a generator. This is the key question with natural gas.

A generator can be a hungry appliance, and it has to draw its fuel alongside everything else in the house. Before install, a licensed gas pro confirms that your gas meter and the line running to the unit can actually supply what it needs — without starving your furnace or water heater. A larger unit, or a long run from the meter to the generator, is more likely to need an upgrade.

If an upgrade is needed — a larger meter or a heavier line — that's a normal part of some installs, and it's far better to learn it up front than to discover it after the fact. Your gas pro and the utility sort it out together.

✓ This is the gas pro's call, not a guess

You don't have to figure out whether your line is big enough — that's exactly what a licensed gas pro is for. Our gas-line guide walks through what that confirmation involves.

Propane, up close

Out where there's no gas main — and in plenty of homes that simply prefer it — propane is a wonderful, dependable fuel.

Propane is stored as a liquid in a tank on your property and drawn off as a gas to run the generator. It stores for years without breaking down, so a tank sitting ready through a mild season is fuel you can count on when a storm finally hits. It burns clean, too.

Its biggest strength is independence: propane doesn't need a utility line to keep working, so it's available anywhere and keeps running even if the whole area's gas and power are down. For rural homes, that self-reliance is often the deciding point.

The trade-off is simply that a tank holds a finite amount. That's not a drawback so much as a planning item — get the tank size and refill habit right, and propane will carry you through long outages with room to spare.

✓ Stores for years, ready when you are

Because propane keeps for years, a well-sized tank is like a pantry for power — full and waiting. The trick is starting an outage with it topped up, which is easy once it's a habit.

Propane: tank size and a refill plan

With propane, two friendly questions do most of the work: how big a tank, and how you'll keep it filled.

A bigger tank means longer running between refills and more cushion for a long outage — so the right tank size depends on how much you're backing up and how long your outages tend to run. Your installer sizes the tank to your generator and your needs; it isn't a guess, and I won't throw a number at you.

The refill plan is just as important. Many folks set up automatic delivery or a standing arrangement with a propane supplier, so the tank is topped up before storm season and never runs low at the wrong moment. Keeping an eye on the gauge is the one small habit propane asks of you.

✓ Size for the outage you'd hate to face

When you and your installer pick a tank, plan around a long, inconvenient outage, not an average one. A little extra tank is cheap peace of mind — and our sizing guide helps you think through the loads behind it.

Propane when it's bitter cold

Here in Ohio, cold matters, so let's be honest about how propane behaves when the temperature really drops.

Propane has to turn from liquid to gas — vaporize — to feed the generator, and in extreme cold that vaporization slows down. In plain terms, a very cold tank can struggle to hand over fuel as quickly as a hungry generator wants it. This is a known, well-understood thing, not a surprise.

The fix is design, not worry: a properly sized tank, placed and set up by your gas pro for your climate, keeps up even in a deep freeze. Bigger tanks and correct placement give propane the surface it needs to vaporize well. Your pro handles this so you don't have to.

✓ We cover winter in its own guide

The full winter picture — cold-weather kits, keeping snow off the unit, and propane in the cold — lives in our cold-weather guide. Here, just know that a well-sized tank is the answer, and it's the pro's job.

Many units run on either fuel

Here's a reassuring fact that takes some pressure off the decision: a lot of standby generators can run on either fuel.

Many units are what's called field-convertible — built to run on natural gas or propane, with the installer setting the fuel during the install. That means the machine itself often isn't the thing that locks you in; your home's fuel situation is.

It also means that if your circumstances change down the road — say a gas main finally reaches your road — a conversion may be possible without replacing the whole unit. Whether that applies to a given model is a question for your installer, but it's a comforting bit of flexibility to know about.

✓ Ask whether your unit is convertible

When you're comparing quotes, it's worth asking whether the unit can run on both fuels and how it's set. It rarely changes today's choice, but it keeps your options open for tomorrow.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

The fuel that's obvious for a house in town is often the opposite of the one that's obvious for a farmhouse on a well. Where you live tends to point straight at the answer.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, a gas main usually runs down the street, so natural gas is often the natural pick — and because city water keeps flowing on its own, your generator is about food, warmth, and comfort rather than keeping a pump running.

- Natural gas is frequently already at the house, making for a simple, nothing-to-refill supply.
- No tank on a smaller lot means one less thing to place, screen, or keep clear.
- Your gas pro still confirms the existing line and meter can feed the unit before anything is installed.
- If your street has no gas main, propane is a perfectly good option in town, too.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country there's often no gas main at all, so propane is usually the answer — and the stakes are higher, because when the power quits your well pump quits with it, and no electricity means no water.

- Propane lets a rural home have a standby anywhere, with no utility gas line required.
- Because the well pump has to keep running, size the tank for a long outage — our well-pump guide covers the pump's demands.
- A standing refill arrangement keeps the tank topped up through storm season, when you'll need it most.
- Store some drinking water as a simple backup, and keep your propane supplier's number handy.

★ Not sure which fuel your home should use?

Tell me whether you have a gas main at the house or you're out on a well, and I'll help you see which fuel makes sense before you call an installer. Call (330) 200-8042.

How to choose, without overthinking it

For most homes the decision is simpler than it first looks. Start with what you already have.

If a gas main serves your home and the line can feed the unit, natural gas is usually the path of least resistance — nothing to refill, nothing to watch. If there's no gas main, propane is your answer, and a good one. That single fact settles it for a great many homes.

Where both are truly options, it comes down to preference: the always-on convenience of piped gas, or the independence and storability of a tank you control. There's no wrong answer — both keep your lights on when your pro sizes them right.

★ Talk it through with me first

Before you weigh quotes, tell me what your home already has and what your outages are like, and I'll help you picture the right fuel. It's a five-minute conversation that saves a lot of second-guessing. Call (330) 200-8042.

Staying powered through a long outage

A long outage is where the two fuels feel most different, so it's worth picturing how each one carries you through days, not hours.

With natural gas, a long outage mostly takes care of itself — the supply keeps flowing, so the generator can run for as long as the power's out without you doing a thing. That hands-off endurance is natural gas at its best.

With propane, a long outage is where your tank size and refill plan earn their keep. A well-sized tank carries you comfortably; if an outage truly drags on, you arrange a refill. Keeping the tank topped up before storm season means you almost never have to think about it in the moment.

✓ Plan for the long one, either way

Whichever fuel you choose, the readiness that matters is done before the storm — a confirmed gas line, or a full, well-sized tank. Our storm-readiness guide turns that into a simple checklist.

The safety side of fuel

Both fuels are safe when handled by pros and treated with respect — and there's one habit worth carrying for as long as you own the system.

Natural gas and propane are both flammable, and both are given a strong 'rotten egg' odor on purpose so a leak is easy to notice. The connections themselves are licensed work, leak-tested by your gas pro — not something to tinker with yourself.

Your part is simply to know the smell and what to do about it. A faint whiff near the unit after a storm is worth a look; a strong, spreading gas smell is an emergency, every time.

! If you ever smell gas

Leave the area right away, don't flip switches or light anything, and call your gas company or 911 from somewhere safe. A gas smell is always treated as an emergency, never a wait-and-see.

What the fuel hookup involves

Connecting the fuel is its own careful job, and it's firmly in licensed-pro territory. Here's the shape of it, in brief.

For natural gas, a licensed gas pro runs or connects the line from your meter to the unit, confirms the supply is adequate, and leak-tests the work. For propane, the pro sets or connects the tank, sizes it to your generator, and tests the connection. Either way, the utility or supplier is coordinated as needed.

The full step-by-step — and what to expect from your gas pro — lives in our gas-line guide, so we won't duplicate it here. The point for now is simply that this part is never a do-it-yourself job.

! Never do gas work yourself

Running or altering a gas line is licensed work for good reason — a mistake can be dangerous. Leave every bit of the fuel connection to a licensed gas pro, and let them leak-test it before it's used.

The cost feel of each fuel

I won't quote you dollar figures — they shift too much to be honest — but I can tell you how the two fuels tend to feel on the wallet.

Natural gas usually means no tank to buy or rent and a fuel that's billed as you use it, right on your utility statement. Propane means a tank — bought or leased — and fuel you purchase by the fill, with prices that move with the season and the market.

Which works out friendlier over time depends on local prices, how often you run, and whether a natural-gas line needs upgrading in the first place. That's exactly the kind of thing to compare with itemized quotes rather than a rule of thumb.

✓ Get itemized quotes

Ask each installer to spell out the fuel side — any line upgrade, any tank cost — as its own line item. Our cost-and-value guide shows you how to read the whole picture fairly.

A few myths, cleared up

Some common beliefs about generator fuel just aren't so. Let's clear the air.

- **'Natural gas is truly unlimited.'** It usually keeps flowing during outages, which is a real advantage — but no supply is literally unlimited, and your line still has to be big enough to feed the unit.
- **'Propane goes bad sitting in the tank.'** No — propane stores for years without breaking down. A tank that's sat through a quiet season is still ready when you need it.
- **'My gas line already heats the house, so it's ready for a generator.'** Not necessarily — a generator can need more than your heating appliances, so a gas pro has to confirm the supply first.
- **'Propane won't work in an Ohio winter.'** It works fine when the tank is sized and placed for the cold — that's a design detail your gas pro handles, not a reason to rule propane out.

✓ When in doubt, ask a plain question

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

Which fuel suits which home

A quick gut-check. See which of these sounds most like your situation.

- ☐ You already have natural gas at the house and want the simplest, nothing-to-refill fuel — natural gas is likely your pick.
- ☐ There's no gas main where you live — propane lets you have a standby anywhere.
- ☐ You want a fuel that stores for years and keeps working even if the area's gas is down — that's propane.
- ☐ You'd rather never watch a gauge or schedule a refill — that points to natural gas.
- ☐ You're honestly not sure — both are proven, and your gas pro will confirm what your home can support.

✓ Most homes fit one clearly

For the large majority of homes, one fuel is the obvious fit the moment you know whether a gas main reaches you. If you're in the rare middle, that's exactly what a conversation is for.

Living with your fuel, day to day

Once it's in, the two fuels ask slightly different things of you — both easy, once you know them.

- **On natural gas:** there's essentially nothing to do — the fuel arrives on its own, and you never watch a gauge.
- **On propane:** glance at the tank gauge now and then, especially before storm season, and top it up before it runs low.
- **On propane in a long outage:** arrange a refill if it drags on, and keep your supplier's number somewhere handy.
- **Either fuel:** keep the area around the unit — and any tank — clear, and let your annual service check the fuel connections.

✓ It becomes second nature

Whichever fuel you land on, the small routine fades into the background fast. A standby is meant to be reassuring, not one more chore to fret over.

What I do, and what I leave to the pros

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

- **What I help with:** weighing natural gas against propane for your home, making sense of quotes, lining up licensed pros I trust, and teaching you your system once it's in.
- **What only a licensed gas pro does:** confirming your gas supply, running or connecting the line, sizing and setting a propane tank, and leak-testing the work.
- **What I never do:** gas work of any kind — that's not my license, and your safety deserves the real thing.

★ Call before you're deep in it

The best time to reach me is while you're still deciding, not after something's installed and puzzling. A little guidance up front saves a lot of second-guessing. Reach me at (330) 200-8042.

Questions worth asking your gas pro

Whether you're talking to an installer, a gas pro, or to me, these get you to a fuel choice you actually understand.

Q: Can my existing gas line and meter really feed this unit?

The heart of the natural-gas question. A licensed gas pro confirms it, and tells you up front if a meter or line upgrade is needed — not after the fact.

Q: What size propane tank do you recommend, and why?

So you understand how long it'll carry you and how often you'll refill. Ask them to size it for a long outage, not an average one.

Q: Is this unit convertible between natural gas and propane?

Good to know for flexibility down the road. It rarely changes today's choice, but it keeps your options open.

Q: Will the tank or line handle our coldest weather?

For propane especially, ask how the tank size and placement keep up in a deep freeze — our cold-weather guide covers this too.

✓ There's no silly question

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

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about generator fuel, answered plainly.

Q: Which is better, natural gas or propane?

Neither, in general — it depends on your home. If you have natural gas and the line can feed the unit, that's usually simplest. If you don't, propane is a dependable answer anywhere.

Q: Will natural gas run out during an outage?

It usually keeps flowing, since the gas system doesn't rely on your home's electricity — which is a real advantage. No supply is literally unlimited, but for most outages you needn't ration it.

Q: How long will a propane tank last?

That depends on the tank size and how much you're running — which is why your installer sizes the tank to your needs. Plan refills for a long outage, and keep it topped up before storm season.

Q: Can I switch fuels later?

Often, yes — many units are field-convertible between natural gas and propane, with the installer setting the fuel. Ask whether your specific unit allows it.

Q: Does cold weather affect propane?

In extreme cold, propane vaporizes more slowly, but a properly sized and placed tank keeps up — your gas pro handles that. Our cold-weather guide covers the winter details.

★ Still weighing the two? Let's talk

Sorting out natural gas versus propane is exactly the kind of thing I love to help with, with nothing to sell you. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and let's talk it through.

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 choosing a fuel for 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

Natural Gas vs. Propane

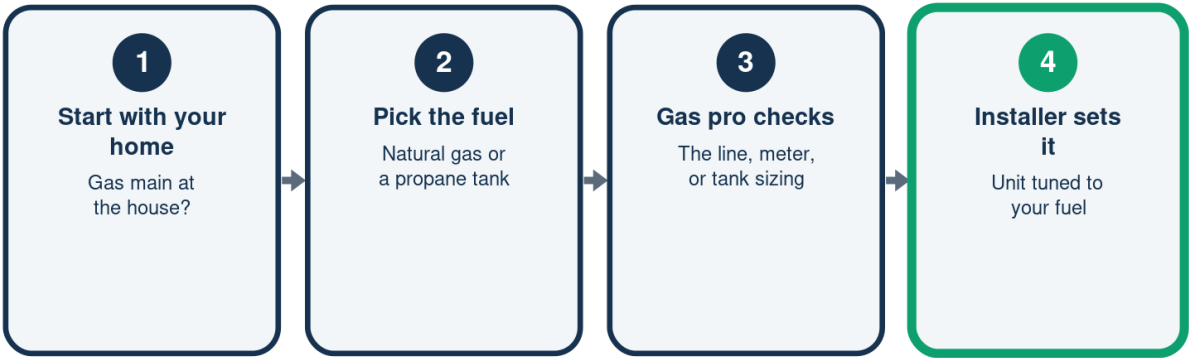
The same job, two very different supplies

	Natural gas	Propane
Comes from	A utility line	An on-site tank
In an outage	Keeps flowing	Draws from tank
Refilling	Nothing to do	Plan refills
No gas main?	Not available	Works anywhere
Storing it	Not stored	Keeps for years

Neither is 'better' — it's about what your home already has.

How Your Fuel Gets Set

From your home to a unit tuned for it



Field-convertible units let the installer set gas or propane.

What Each Fuel Asks of You

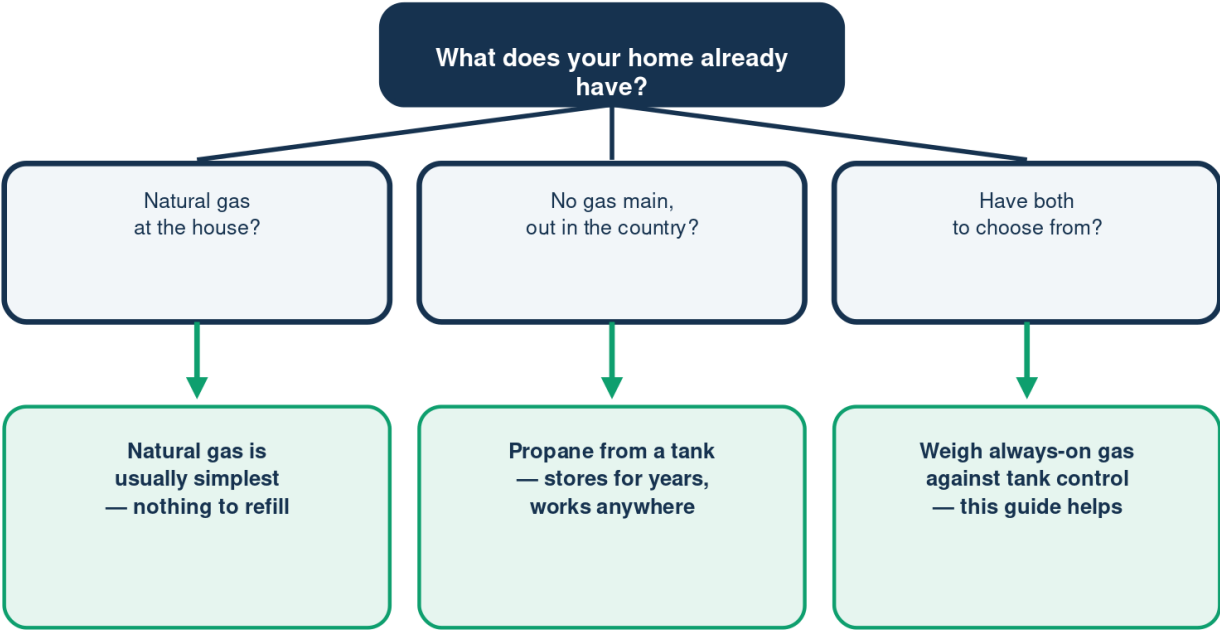
Day to day, and when the power's out

	Natural gas	Propane
Day to day	Nothing to do	Check the gauge
Long outage	Keeps flowing	Plan a refill
Very cold	No effect	Sizing handles it
Where it works	Needs a gas main	Anywhere

Your gas pro confirms and sizes the supply either way.

Which Fuel Is Likely Yours?

Let what your home already has point the way



Your gas pro confirms the line or tank can actually feed the unit.

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



Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.
You just have to remember you can call.
Friendly, in-home tech help -- I come to you.

BILL'S PROMISE

If you are not 100% happy with a visit, I will
make it right -- or refund it. No awkwardness,
no fine print. That is how I would want to be treated.

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

Bill@BillsHomeTech.com · Mon–Sat 9:00 AM – 7:30 PM

— 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*



Book a visit —
billshometech.com/book

Use of these guides is subject to our Terms of Use (billshometech.com/terms-of-use).

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

Bill@BillsHomeTech.com · Mon–Sat 9:00 AM – 7:30 PM

For general information only — not professional advice. Use at your own risk. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech