



An Extended Guide · No. 1308

Keeping the Sump Pump Running

A dry basement when the storm knocks power out

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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. With a sump pump, the very storm that fills your basement is often the same storm that knocks out the power — so the unit that keeps the pump running has to stay safely outdoors and clear of drifts and debris, right when the weather is at its worst.

Let's keep your basement dry, automatically

A sump pump has one job — to pump water out of your basement before it becomes a flood — and it can only do that job with power. This guide is about making sure the power is there when the storm takes the grid down.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. I've spent 30+ years helping folks get comfortable with the equipment in their homes, patiently and in plain language. A wet basement is one of those worries that keeps people up during a storm, and a little planning takes most of that worry away.

We'll keep this squarely on the sump: why the outage and the flood tend to arrive together, how a whole-home standby generator keeps the pump running on its own, and why I almost always suggest a second layer alongside it. The bigger questions — sizing, the transfer switch, the install — live in their own guides, and I'll point you to them.

★ There's nothing to sell you here

I don't sell generators or pumps, and I earn no commission, so this is just honest advice. If you'd like a second opinion before you spend a dime, call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll think it through together — free.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you already understand how to keep your basement dry through an outage.

- ❑ A power outage during a storm is exactly when your sump is needed most — and exactly when it can lose power.
- ❑ A whole-home standby generator keeps the sump running automatically, whether you're home, asleep, or away.
- ❑ Pair it with a battery-backup sump pump as a second layer — even an automatic transfer has a brief gap before the generator takes over.
- ❑ The sump is a motor with a starting surge, so it belongs on your must-run list — our sizing guide handles the size.
- ❑ Test it the easy way: pour a bucket of water into the pit and watch the pump kick on and empty it.
- ❑ Keep the pit, the float, and the discharge line clear, and check the little check-valve now and then.

! Don't lean the whole basement on one machine

A standby generator is a wonderful layer, but it's still a machine that can be down for service on the wrong day. A battery-backup sump pump is cheap insurance that covers the gap — I rarely suggest one without the other.

What a sump pump does, and why power is the weak link

The sump pump is a quiet hero most of the year — until the one day it can't run.

Down at the lowest point of your basement or crawlspace sits a pit, called the sump. Groundwater collects there, a float rises with the water, and the pump switches on and sends that water out and away through a discharge pipe. It's simple, it's automatic, and it works beautifully — as long as it has electricity.

That's the whole vulnerability in one sentence: no power, no pump, no protection. The pit fills, then keeps filling, and the water has nowhere to go but up into your basement. Everything else about a sump is dependable; the power is the part worth backing up.

✓ Know where your sump is and how it sounds

If you're not sure where your sump pit is or what the pump sounds like when it runs, that's worth learning on a calm day. A familiar hum is easy to miss; a silent pit during a storm is what you want to notice.

The storm is exactly when you need it

Here's the part that catches people off guard, and it's worth sitting with for a moment.

A sump pump earns its keep during heavy rain, fast snowmelt, and rising groundwater — in other words, during storms. But storms are also the leading cause of power outages. So the moment your basement is taking on the most water is often the very moment the pump loses the power to fight it.

That cruel bit of timing is the whole reason this guide exists. Backing up the sump isn't about a rare, unlucky coincidence — it's about the most ordinary pattern there is: the big storm rolls through, the lights go out, and the water keeps coming.

★ This is a common worry, and a fixable one

A flooded basement during an outage is one of the most common fears I hear about, and one of the most satisfying to solve. If it's been gnawing at you, call or text me at (330) 200-8042 — we can put a real plan behind it.

How a standby keeps the sump running

This is the reassuring part: with a standby generator, you don't have to do a thing.

The same automatic transfer switch that watches your home's power watches it for the sump too. When the grid goes down, it starts the generator, lets it warm up briefly, and switches your home — sump included — over to generator power, usually within seconds. The float rises, the pump runs, and the water goes out just like any other day.

Because the generator draws from a permanent fuel supply, it keeps the sump powered for as long as the outage lasts, without anyone hauling out a portable or running cords into a wet basement in the dark. That last part matters more than it sounds — more on water and electricity later.

✓ The switching is a safety feature, too

That automatic switch keeps your generator's power and the utility's power from ever meeting — the electrical code (NEC 702.5) requires exactly that — so there's no dangerous backfeed onto the lines outside. Our transfer-switch guide explains it in plain English.

Why a standby alone isn't quite the whole answer

I want to be straight with you here, because it's the single most useful thing in this guide.

An automatic standby is fast, but it isn't instant. There's a brief gap — a handful of seconds — between the moment the power drops and the moment the generator is carrying the load. In a hard, fast storm, the pit can rise in those seconds, and the pump isn't running yet.

There's a second, rarer case too: a generator is a machine, and machines occasionally have an off day — a service that ran long, a battery that needed replacing, a fault. A good basement plan doesn't rest its whole weight on any single device, no matter how good that device is.

! One layer covers most days; two layers cover the bad ones

The fix is simple and I'll cover it next: pair the standby with a battery-backup sump pump. Each one covers exactly the moments the other can't, and together they're far stronger than either alone.

Two layers that keep you dry

Think of it as a belt and suspenders for your basement — two simple layers, each with a different strength.

Layer	What it's best at
Standby generator	Long outages, hands-free, powers the whole home
Battery-backup sump	Instant coverage in the first seconds, and if the main pump ever fails
Your main sump pump	The everyday workhorse, run by grid or generator

A battery-backup sump pump is a second pump that sits in the same pit with its own battery. The instant the power drops — or the instant the main pump can't keep up — it takes over, no warm-up needed. It won't run for days on its own, but it doesn't have to: it just has to carry you through the gap until the standby is humming along.

✓ **Let a pro match the two**

The battery-backup pump, the pit, and the discharge should all suit each other. A plumber or electrician can size and set the backup pump; I'm glad to help you understand the setup and line up the right pro.

The sump is a motor — put it on your must-run list

When you plan a standby generator, you make a must-run list: the things you truly want running in an outage. The sump belongs on it.

Like any motor, a sump pump needs a bigger jolt of power to start than to keep running — a brief starting surge. It's usually a modest load compared to something like a well pump or central air, but it's a real one, and your installer needs to know it's there so the generator can deliver that surge the instant the float calls.

How big a generator you need is a proper load calculation, not a guess from a chart — and it's work for your licensed installer. Just make sure the sump, and the battery-backup pump's charger, are written on the list you hand them.

★ Start with the list, and I'll help

Jot down what you'd want running in a two-day outage — sump and all — and our sizing guide walks through turning that into the right-sized unit. Text your list to me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll help you think it through.

Testing your sump before storm season

A sump pump can sit quiet for months, so the only way to trust it is to test it — and it's genuinely easy.

- ❑ Pour a bucket or two of clean water slowly into the pit until the float rises.
- ❑ Watch and listen for the pump to switch on by itself as the water climbs.
- ❑ Confirm it pumps the pit down and shuts off cleanly on its own.
- ❑ If you have a battery-backup pump, test it the same way with the main pump unplugged — then plug the main pump back in.
- ❑ Make a habit of it a couple of times a year, and before the wet season especially.

✓ If it hums but doesn't pump, stop and ask

A pump that buzzes or hums but doesn't move water may be jammed, air-locked, or worn out. That's a call to a plumber, not a reason to keep poking at it — and far better to learn it on test day than during a storm.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

A sump-pump plan looks a little different on a tidy in-town lot than it does on a farm with a private well — but the goal, a dry basement through the storm, is the same.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, a wet basement often means a finished space — a family room, a bedroom, a home office — plus the furnace, the water heater, and stored belongings all down where the water rises. Outages tend to be shorter here, but the damage from even one flood can be steep.

- A standby covers the sump along with the fridge, furnace, and lights — comfort and dryness on the same automatic system.
- A battery-backup sump is the layer that catches the first seconds of a fast summer storm.
- Finished basements, natural gas, and shorter outages make a modestly sized standby a comfortable fit for many in-town homes.
- Smaller lots mean placement, setbacks, and any neighborhood rules deserve a look — our placement guide covers that.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country the sump often shares the must-run list with the well pump, and both are motors that must run to keep the house livable. Rural outages also tend to run longer, so the fuel plan and the backup layers matter even more.

- The well pump and the sump are usually the two biggest motor loads — our well-pump guide covers the pump's side of it.
- No natural gas usually means propane, so tank size and a refill plan matter for a long, wet stretch.
- A battery-backup sump is just as valuable here, covering the gap and any night the generator is down for service.
- More room on the lot eases placement, but the gas and electrical runs to the unit can be longer.

★ Not sure which camp you're in?

Tell me whether you're on city water or a well, whether your basement is finished, and what your storms are usually like, and I'll help you picture the right setup. Call (330) 200-8042.

Keeping the pit, float, and discharge clear

The best backup power in the world can't help a pump that's choked with debris. A little upkeep keeps the water moving.

- **The pit:** keep gravel, silt, and debris out of the sump so the pump and float can do their jobs.
- **The float:** make sure it can rise and fall freely and isn't wedged against the pit wall or a pipe.
- **The discharge line:** keep the pipe that carries water outside clear and its outlet unblocked, so water actually leaves.
- **The outside end:** make sure the discharge empties well away from the foundation, not right back toward the house.

✓ A yearly look-over goes a long way

Once a year, glance into the pit, run the bucket test, and walk out to where the discharge lets go. Five quiet minutes now beats a wet basement later — and I'm happy to show you what to look for.

The check-valve — a small part that matters

There's one small part on the discharge line that quietly saves the pump a lot of extra work.

The check-valve is a one-way gate on the pipe leaving the pump. When the pump shuts off, it stops the column of water in the pipe from draining straight back down into the pit. Without a working check-valve, the pump ends up re-pumping the same water over and over, wearing itself out and running far more than it should.

You don't need to fuss over it, but it's worth knowing it exists. If your pump seems to cycle on and on, or you hear water rushing back down after it stops, a tired check-valve is a common, inexpensive culprit for a plumber to sort out.

✓ Two pumps, and the valves to match

If you add a battery-backup pump, the plumber will make sure the valves are arranged so the two pumps work together instead of pushing water back at each other. It's a small detail that's easy to get right when it's set up properly.

Standing water and electricity — a safety word

This page is short on purpose, because it's the one I most want you to remember.

If your basement has already taken on water, treat it as dangerous, not just inconvenient. Standing water can reach outlets, cords, the furnace, the water heater, and the pump itself — and water plus electricity is a genuine shock hazard. This is a moment to be cautious, not heroic.

! Don't wade into a flooded basement

If there's standing water near anything electrical, stay out. Don't wade in to save belongings or restart a pump. If it's safe to reach the main breaker without stepping into water, cutting power helps — if it isn't, leave it, get everyone to safety, and call an electrician or your utility. No basement is worth a shock.

Knowing before it's a flood

The earlier you know something's wrong, the smaller the problem stays. A couple of simple additions do the watching for you.

A water alarm in or near the sump pit is an inexpensive little device that sounds off the moment the water rises too high — an early warning that the pump isn't keeping up, long before the water reaches your carpet. Some models can even alert your phone.

Your standby generator can watch over things too. Most modern units offer phone alerts that tell you when they've started, lost utility power, or hit a fault — so you know your basement is being protected even when you're away. Our monitoring guide explains how that works, and I can help you set it up.

✓ Peace of mind for the family, too

For adult kids keeping an eye on a parent's home, these alerts are a real comfort — a quiet 'all's well' most days, and a heads-up on the rare day something needs attention.

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 your basement.

- **What I help with:** deciding whether a standby fits your home, building your must-run list with the sump on it, making sense of quotes, and lining up the licensed pros to do the work.
- **What licensed pros do:** a licensed electrician wires the transfer switch and the generator; a plumber or electrician sets and connects the battery-backup sump.
- **What I never do:** the electrical work, the gas work, or the plumbing myself — 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 planning, not after a storm has already found the weak spot. A little guidance up front saves a lot of grief. Reach me at (330) 200-8042.

Common sump-backup mistakes

A handful of avoidable slip-ups account for most wet-basement regret. Now you'll know them in advance.

- **Counting on the standby alone** and skipping the battery-backup pump that covers the first seconds and the off days.
- **Leaving the sump off the must-run list**, so the generator isn't sized to carry it comfortably.
- **Never testing the pump** until a storm, when there's no time to fix a surprise.
- **Letting the pit, float, or discharge clog**, so the pump has power but can't move the water.
- **Forgetting the battery-backup pump's battery is a wear item** that needs checking and eventual replacing.
- **Wading into a flooded basement** to save things, instead of cutting power safely and calling a pro.

! The battery is easy to forget

A battery-backup sump is only as good as its battery, and batteries quietly weaken with age. Fold a quick check into a routine you already have, and replace it on the schedule the maker recommends.

Signs this setup is worth it for you

Backing up the sump matters more for some homes than others. These are the situations where folks are usually glad they did.

- Your basement has flooded before, or your sump runs often during wet weather.
- You have a finished basement, a home business down there, or stored belongings you'd hate to lose.
- Your outages are frequent or long, or storms routinely take your power out.
- You're on a well, so the sump shares the load with a pump you also can't do without.
- You travel, or there are stretches when no one able to react is home.
- The furnace, water heater, or electrical panel sit low enough that water would reach them.

★ And when a simpler plan will do

If your basement stays bone dry and your sump almost never runs, a battery-backup pump alone may be plenty, without a whole standby. I'll tell you honestly when that's your situation. Call (330) 200-8042.

The road to a dry basement

If you decide to back up the sump, here's the calm path from worried to covered.

- ❑ Make your must-run list, with the sump and the backup pump's charger on it.
- ❑ Add a battery-backup sump pump as your instant second layer.
- ❑ Get a load calculation and a few quotes from licensed installers.
- ❑ Have licensed pros do the electrical, the transfer switch, and the backup-pump plumbing.
- ❑ Test the whole setup with the bucket-in-the-pit method.
- ❑ Set up a water alarm and generator monitoring so you know before there's a problem.
- ❑ Put a yearly check on the calendar so it all stays ready.

✓ You don't walk it alone

Each of these steps has its own guide in this series, and I'm glad to walk any of them with you in person. One calm step at a time is all it takes.

Questions worth asking before you commit

Whether you're talking to an installer, a plumber, or to me, these get you a plan you actually understand.

Q: Will the standby cover the sump automatically, and how quickly?

It should switch over within seconds — but ask, so you know why a battery-backup pump still matters for those first moments.

Q: Is my sump on the must-run list, and is the unit sized for it?

The sump's starting surge should be accounted for in the load calculation — our sizing guide explains how that works.

Q: Can you set up a battery-backup sump to work with my main pump?

A plumber or electrician arranges the two pumps and their valves so they cooperate. Ask how the backup's battery gets checked, too.

Q: How do I test the whole thing, and how often?

The bucket-in-the-pit test is simple enough to do yourself a couple of times a year — ask them to show you once.

✓ There's no silly question

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

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from folks worried about a wet basement, answered plainly.

Q: Will a standby generator run my sump pump on its own?

Yes. The automatic transfer switch senses the outage, starts the generator, and switches your home — sump included — over on its own, usually within seconds, whether you're there or not.

Q: If the standby covers the sump, why do I still need a battery backup?

Because the generator takes a few seconds to pick up the load, and because any machine can have an off day. The battery-backup pump covers exactly those moments. Two layers, not one.

Q: Is a sump pump hard for a generator to run?

Usually not — it's a motor with a modest starting surge, smaller than a well pump or central air. It just needs to be on your must-run list so the unit is sized to carry it.

Q: How do I know if my sump pump still works?

Pour a bucket of water into the pit and watch it kick on, empty the pit, and shut off. If it hums without pumping, call a plumber — don't wait for a storm to find out.

Q: My basement is already flooding — can I go turn the pump back on?

Please don't wade into standing water near anything electrical. If you can reach the main breaker without stepping into water, cut the power; otherwise, stay out and call an electrician or your utility.

★ Still have questions? That's what I'm here for

A dry basement is worth getting right, and I'm glad to help you think it through with nothing to sell you. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and let's talk it over.

Bringing it all together

A dry basement through a storm comes down to a simple idea: keep the pump powered, and don't lean the whole thing on one machine.

A whole-home standby generator keeps the sump running automatically, for as long as the outage lasts, with nothing for you to do. A battery-backup sump pump covers the brief gap before it takes over, and stands ready on the rare day the generator is down. Together, they're a genuinely dependable pair.

Round it out with the easy habits — the bucket test, a clear pit and discharge, a healthy check-valve, and a water alarm — and put the sump on your must-run list so our sizing guide and your installer size the unit right. That's the whole plan, and it's a very doable one.

★ Let's make your basement one less worry

Whether you're just wondering or ready to plan, I'd be glad to help you get this right. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll take it one calm step at a time.

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 backing up your sump pump 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

Layers That Keep a Basement Dry

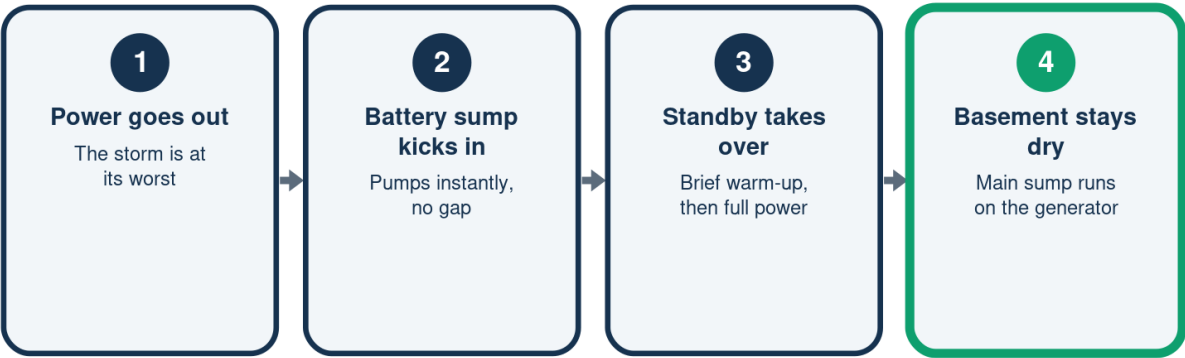
Name these and the whole plan makes sense

	What it is	What it does
Main sump pump	Pump in the pit	Sends water away
Standby generator	Power, hands-free	Runs it in an outage
Battery-backup sump	A second pump	Covers the gap
Clear pit and line	The upkeep part	Lets water get out

A standby and a battery-backup sump back each other up.

When the Storm Knocks Out the Power

The whole sequence — and you do none of it



Two layers mean the water never gets ahead of you.

Standby Alone vs. Two Layers

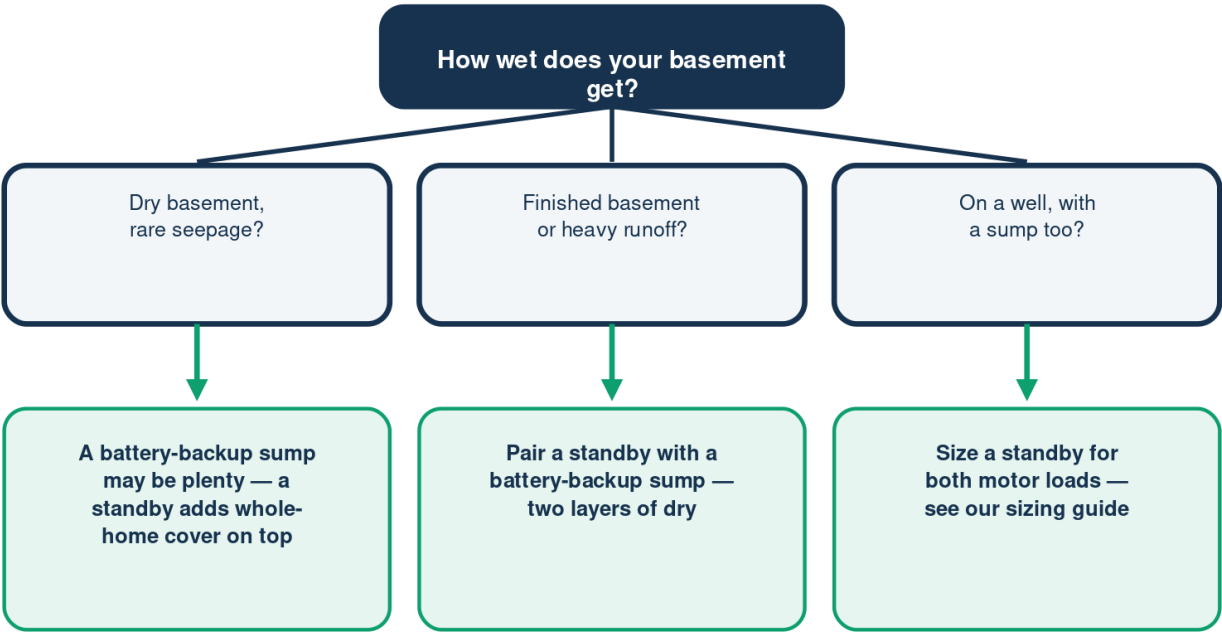
Why the second layer earns its keep

	Standby only	Both layers
The startup gap	A few seconds	Covered instantly
If it needs service	No cover	Battery covers
A stuck main pump	Still stuck	Backup can catch it
Peace of mind	Good	Best

Two layers cover each other's off days.

How Much Backup Does Your Basement Need?

Let your basement point the way



Sizing is a load calculation by a licensed installer — never a guess.

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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