



An Extended Guide · No. 1832

Your Car as a Backup in an Outage

A rolling battery — used safely

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

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! Read this first — never run anything that burns fuel indoors

Anything that burns fuel — a generator, a grill, a camp stove, a charcoal chimney, or a car engine — gives off carbon monoxide, an invisible, odorless gas that can kill in minutes. Never run any of them indoors, in a garage, in a shed, in a basement, or on a porch, not even with the door open and a fan going. A generator belongs outside only, well away from the house — the safety agencies say at least 20 feet — with the exhaust pointed away from every window, door, and vent. Put battery-backup carbon-monoxide alarms on every level and outside the bedrooms, and test them. If an alarm sounds, or anyone feels dizzy, sick, or sleepy, get everyone into fresh air first and ask questions later. Your car engine is one of those fuel-burners: it belongs outdoors when running. Never idle it in a closed or attached garage — that is the one rule this whole guide rests on.

Let's put your car to work — safely

Your car is a big battery on wheels, and in an outage it can charge your phone, run the radio, offer brief warmth or cooling, and get you to help. With one firm safety rule, it's a genuinely useful backup.

I'm Bill, and folks are often surprised how much a car can do when the power's out. This guide covers using it well — and the one thing you must never do, which is run it in a closed garage, where its exhaust can kill quickly.

We'll cover charging devices, keeping the tank full, using the radio, and packing a small car kit, plus a word on inverters and electric vehicles. Simple, useful, and safe.

★ Let's make your car part of the plan

If you'd like help setting up your car to charge devices and serve as a backup, I'm glad to help. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

Your car as a backup, on one page

The essentials for using the vehicle safely.

- ☐ Never run the car in a closed or attached garage — carbon monoxide.
- ☐ Charge phones and small devices from the USB or 12-volt socket.
- ☐ Use the car radio for news when the power's out.
- ☐ Keep the gas tank at least half full in storm season.
- ☐ Use the car for brief warmth or cooling — outdoors only.
- ☐ Never leave people or pets in a parked car in heat or cold.
- ☐ Keep a small emergency kit in the trunk.
- ☐ The car can get you to help or a place with power.

! The one rule: never idle in a closed garage

A running engine gives off carbon monoxide, just like a generator. Only run the car outdoors, never in an attached or closed garage, even with the door open.

What your car can — and can't — do

It's a versatile backup, within limits worth understanding.

Your car can charge phones and small devices, run its radio for information, provide brief warmth or cooling, and carry you to help or a place with power. With an inverter, it can run small loads. What it can't safely do is power your house or run for hours in an enclosed space — and it isn't a substitute for a generator or a real backup battery for big needs.

✓ Great for small jobs, not the whole house

Think of the car as a rolling battery for phones, the radio, and a little warmth — not a way to power your home. For that, see our power-options and generator guides.

Charging devices from your car

This is the car's most useful everyday outage job.

Most cars charge a phone through a USB port or a plug-in adapter in the 12-volt socket. Keep the right charging cords and a car adapter in the vehicle so you're always able to top up a phone, a power bank, or small devices. It's a reliable backup when your power banks run low.

You don't need the engine running the whole time — but running it now and then keeps the car's own battery from draining. And whenever the engine runs, the car must be outdoors.

✓ Keep cords in the car

A charging cord and a 12-volt adapter kept permanently in the car mean you can always charge a phone from it. Don't borrow them for daily use.

The rule that matters most

Everything else in this guide is useful. This one keeps you alive.

Never run your car's engine in a closed or attached garage, even with the garage door open. A running engine produces carbon monoxide — invisible, odorless, and deadly — and it builds up fast in an enclosed space, seeping into the house through an attached garage. People have died warming up or charging in a garage during an outage.

If you'll run the car to charge or warm up, pull it outside into the open air, away from open windows and doors. That single habit removes the danger entirely.

! Outdoors, in the open air, always

Only ever run the car outdoors, well clear of the house, when using it as a backup. An attached garage — door open or not — is never safe for a running engine.

Brief warmth or cooling in the car

The car's heater or air conditioning can offer a welcome break — used briefly and outdoors.

On a bitter or sweltering day, sitting in the car with the heat or air conditioning on for a little while can be a real comfort. Do it outdoors only, run the engine just enough, and keep an eye on your fuel. In winter, if there's snow, make sure the tailpipe is clear so exhaust doesn't back up into the car, and crack a window.

! Clear the tailpipe of snow

Snow piled around the exhaust pipe can push carbon monoxide back into the car. Before running the engine in winter, clear the tailpipe and crack a window.

Keep the gas tank full

A simple habit that pays off every storm season.

Gas stations run on electricity, so an outage can shut down the pumps — right when you might want fuel for the car or a generator. Keeping your tank at least half full through storm season means you're never caught empty, and a full tank also gives you more hours of charging, warmth, or cooling from the car.

✓ Fill up when a storm is coming

If a big storm's in the forecast, top off the tank while the stations are still running. Full is always better than searching for an open pump afterward.

The car radio for information

When the power's out, your car radio is a reliable source of news.

The car radio pulls in local AM and FM stations for news, weather, and outage updates, all on the car's own battery. While you're out at the car charging a phone, it's easy to catch the latest. It pairs well with the NOAA weather radio in your kit, which our weather-radio guide covers.

✓ Two jobs, one trip to the car

Charging a phone and catching the news on the radio go together — do both on one trip out to the car, and mind the fuel while the engine runs.

Keep a small kit in the car

Your car should carry its own little emergency kit year-round.

- Water and a few non-perishable snacks.
- A blanket, and warm gear in winter.
- A flashlight and spare batteries.
- Phone charging cords and a 12-volt adapter.
- A basic first-aid kit.
- Jumper cables, and a bright cloth to signal if stranded.

A storm can strand you away from home, so this kit isn't just for outages — it's for any trouble on the road. Our winter-storm guide covers the cold-weather additions.

✓ Pack it once, forget it until needed

A car kit lives in the trunk and asks nothing of you until the day it matters. Assemble it once from things around the house and you're covered.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

The car works the same as a backup everywhere, but longer trips and fewer open stations make fuel planning matter more in the country.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town, stations and help are close, and outages shorter, so the car is a handy charging spot and a quick way to reach a cool or warm place.

- A short trip reaches a store, a charger, or a relative.
- Open gas stations are usually close once power spreads back.
- The car easily covers phone charging for a short outage.
- Keep the tank topped up anyway — pumps need power.

If you are out in the country on a well

In the country, trips are longer and open stations may be far, so a full tank and a well-stocked car kit matter more.

- Keep the tank fuller — the next open station may be a long way.
- The car may be your best charging source over a long outage.
- Longer drives to help mean a solid car kit is worth having.
- Fuel for both the car and a generator may come from the same trip, so plan ahead.

★ Let's set your car up as a backup

Town or country, I'll help you stock a car kit and set up charging so your vehicle is ready to help. Call (330) 200-8042.

Running small loads with an inverter

A power inverter lets a car run small household devices — within limits.

A power inverter plugs into the car and turns its power into regular household current for small loads — charging a laptop, running a small device. Match the inverter to modest loads and don't overload it, and remember the car still must be outdoors when the engine runs. An inverter won't run big things like a fridge or heater — that's a job for a generator or battery station, per our power-options guide.

! Small loads only, engine outdoors

A car inverter is for small devices, not big appliances. Keep the load modest, don't drain the car battery flat, and never run the engine indoors to power it.

If you drive an electric vehicle

An EV changes the picture a little, with some real advantages and one catch.

Some electric vehicles can power devices, or even parts of a home, through special equipment — check what your specific vehicle and its maker offer. An EV also makes no exhaust, so it doesn't pose the same carbon-monoxide risk as a gas engine. The catch is that an EV depends on charging, so in a long outage you'll want to start with a good charge and plan how you'd recharge.

✓ Start a storm with a full charge

If you drive an EV, charge it up when a storm's in the forecast. A full battery is both your transportation and, with the right equipment, a potential power source.

The car as a short-term refuge

In a pinch, the car offers a climate-controlled break — with care.

If the house gets too cold or too hot, the car can be a brief refuge to warm up or cool down, or a comfortable spot to make calls and charge devices. Keep it outdoors and open-air, watch your fuel, and treat it as a short break rather than a place to spend the night with the engine running. For a real relocation, head to a warming or cooling center or a relative's home.

✓ A break, not a bedroom

The car is a fine spot to warm up, cool off, or charge for a while — but don't sleep in it with the engine running. For overnight, go somewhere with real, safe power.

Never leave people or pets in a parked car

A parked car turns deadly hot or cold faster than most people realize.

Never leave children, older adults, or pets alone in a parked car, in any season. In summer, a car heats to lethal temperatures within minutes, even with windows cracked. In deep cold, it offers little protection for long. If you use the car as a refuge, everyone stays together and stays aware.

! Not even for a few minutes

A parked car in the sun can become deadly in minutes. Never leave a child, an older adult, or a pet alone inside one, windows cracked or not.

Fuel and getting around in a long outage

In an extended outage, your car is also your link to fuel, supplies, and help.

With stations possibly down nearby, that full tank lets you reach an area with power to refuel, restock, or charge up. Plan your trips to make the most of the fuel you have, keep your phone charged for navigation, and let someone know where you're going. The car's mobility is one of its biggest advantages in a long outage.

✓ **Combine your errands**

In a long outage, plan one trip that refuels, restocks, and charges everything at once, rather than several short runs. It saves fuel and time.

Keeping your car storm-ready

A little upkeep means the car is ready when you need it as a backup.

- Keep the tank at least half full through storm season.
- Make sure the battery is in good shape, especially before winter.
- Keep the car kit stocked and current.
- Keep charging cords and a 12-volt adapter in the car.
- Know how to safely jump-start it, and keep cables handy.

✓ A healthy battery is the foundation

The car can't help as a backup if it won't start. Have the battery checked before winter, when cold is hardest on it.

Jump-starting and dead batteries

Using the car for charging can run its battery down, so know the basics.

Running the radio and charging devices with the engine off will eventually drain the car's battery, so start the engine now and then to recharge it — outdoors. Keep jumper cables or a portable jump pack on hand, and know how to use them safely, following the car's manual. If you're ever unsure, that's a fine time to call for help.

✓ Run the engine now and then

If you're using the car to charge devices for a while, start the engine periodically — outdoors — so you don't wake up to a dead car battery.

A car backup for very little

Turning your car into a useful backup costs almost nothing.

A charging cord and a 12-volt adapter are inexpensive, and a car kit comes together from blankets, water, and a flashlight you already own. Keeping the tank full is just a habit. The car is a backup you already paid for — these small additions simply help it do more.

✓ Start with a cord and a full tank

The two cheapest, most useful steps are keeping a charging cord in the car and keeping the tank full. Do those and you're most of the way there.

Your before-a-storm car steps

When a storm's coming, get the car ready to help.

- ❑ Fill the gas tank, or fully charge an electric vehicle.
- ❑ Confirm charging cords and a 12-volt adapter are in the car.
- ❑ Check that the car kit is stocked, with winter gear in season.
- ❑ Park where you can safely reach and run it outdoors.
- ❑ Make sure the battery is in good shape.
- ❑ Clear snow from around the car and its tailpipe in winter.

✓ A full tank before it hits

Topping off the tank before a storm is one of the easiest, most useful prep steps — pumps may be down right when you need fuel most.

Your printable car-backup checklist

Everything for using the car safely, in one place.

- ☐ Never run the engine in a closed or attached garage.
- ☐ Charging cords and a 12-volt adapter kept in the car.
- ☐ The tank at least half full through storm season.
- ☐ A stocked car emergency kit in the trunk.
- ☐ The car used for brief warmth or cooling — outdoors only.
- ☐ The tailpipe kept clear of snow in winter.
- ☐ Never leaving people or pets in a parked car.
- ☐ A healthy battery and jumper cables on hand.

★ Want help setting up your car?

I'll help you set up charging, stock a car kit, and use the car safely as a backup. A first visit is a flat \$99. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about using the car in an outage.

Q: Can I run my car in the garage to charge or warm up?

No — never in a closed or attached garage, even with the door open. A running engine gives off carbon monoxide that builds up fast and can seep into the house. Only run the car outdoors, in the open air.

Q: What can my car actually do in an outage?

Charge phones and small devices, run its radio for news, offer brief warmth or cooling, and get you to help or a place with power. With an inverter it can run small loads, but it can't safely power your house.

Q: How do I charge my phone from the car?

Through a USB port or a 12-volt adapter. Keep the right cords in the car, and run the engine now and then — outdoors — so you don't drain the car's own battery while charging.

Q: Why should I keep the gas tank full?

Gas stations run on electricity, so an outage can shut down the pumps. Keeping the tank at least half full through storm season means you're never caught empty, and gives you more hours of charging and warmth from the car.

Q: What if I drive an electric vehicle?

Some EVs can power devices or parts of a home with special equipment, and they make no exhaust — but they depend on charging. Start a storm with a full charge and plan how you'd recharge in a long outage.

★ Let's make your car a good backup

Setting up charging and a car kit is quick and useful. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and I'll help you get your vehicle ready to pitch in.

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 using your car as a backup in an outage 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.

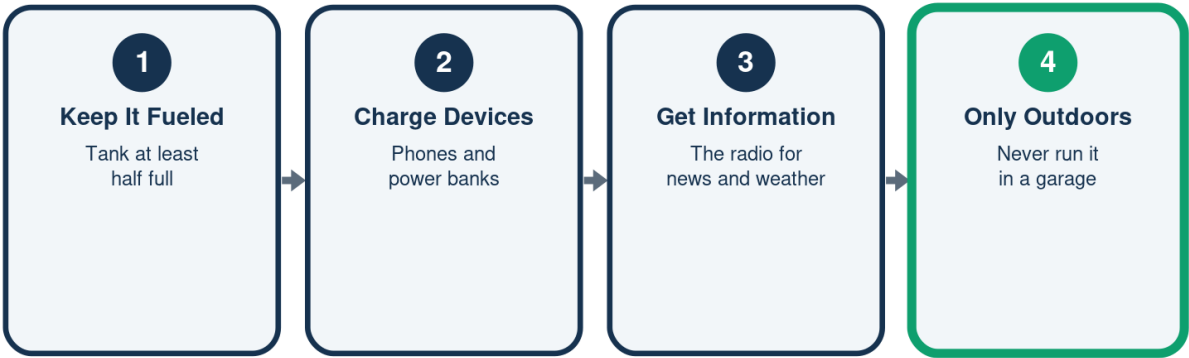
When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day,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

Your Car as a Backup

Four ways it helps — one firm rule



A running engine makes carbon monoxide — keep it outside.

What Your Car Can Do

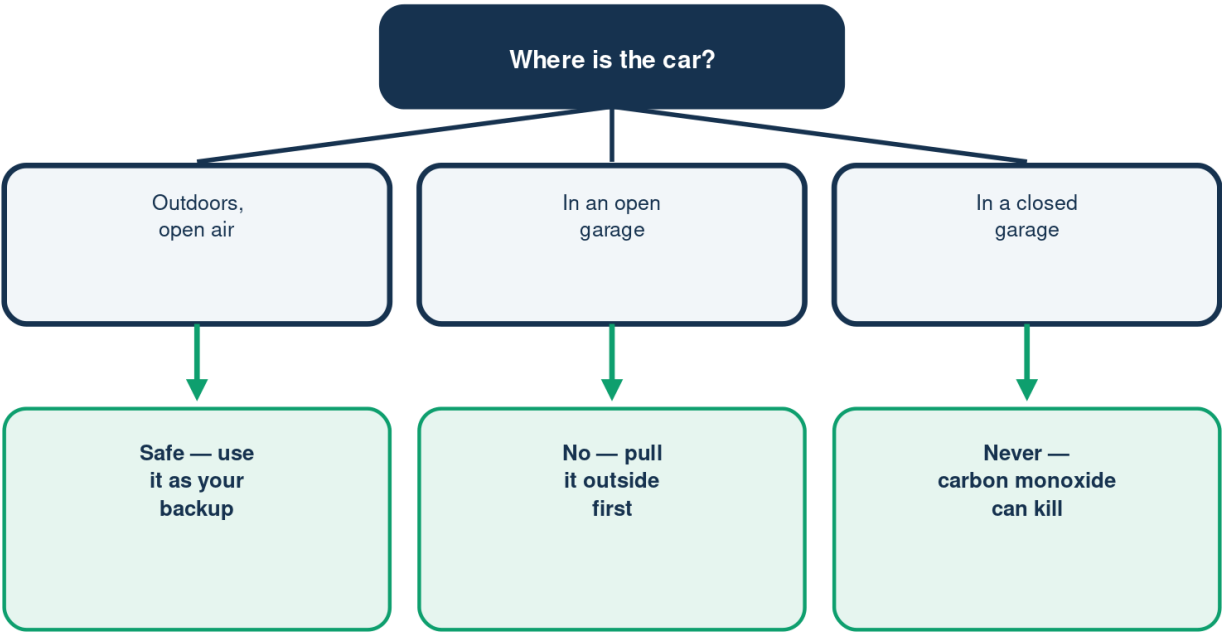
A rolling battery for small jobs

The short version	
Charge	Phones, power banks
Comfort	Brief warmth or cooling
Information	The AM/FM radio
Mobility	Reach help or power
Small loads	With an inverter

Not a way to power the house — see our power-options guide.

Is It Safe to Run the Car This Way?

Check where it is before you start it



An attached garage, door open or not, is never safe to idle in.

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

Your Car Emergency Kit

Keep it in the trunk year-round

What to pack	
Comfort	Blanket, water, snacks
Light	Flashlight, batteries
Charging	Cords, 12-volt adapter
Trouble	First-aid, jumper cables

Add winter gear in season — see our winter-storm guide.



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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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