



An Extended Guide · No. 1824

Carbon-Monoxide Alarms and Generator Safety

The quiet danger, made preventable

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. This guide is all about that danger — the alarms that warn you, and the rules that keep the air in your home safe.

Let's keep the air safe

Carbon monoxide is the quiet danger of an outage. It's invisible and odorless, and it comes from the very things people turn to when the power's out. Good alarms and a few firm rules keep it from ever threatening your home.

I'm Bill, and this is one of the guides I most want folks to read. Every year, carbon monoxide kills dozens of people during outages — almost always from a generator, grill, or heater used somewhere it never should have been. The good news is that it's entirely preventable.

We'll cover the alarms that give you early warning, where to put them, and the outdoor-only rules for anything that burns fuel. It's simple, it's cheap, and it saves lives.

★ I'll help you get protected

I'm glad to help you place and test carbon-monoxide alarms and plan safe generator use. It's some of the most important help I offer. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

Carbon-monoxide safety, on one page

If you remember only this, you've got the heart of it.

- ❑ Put carbon-monoxide alarms on every level and outside bedrooms.
- ❑ Use alarms with battery backup, and test them regularly.
- ❑ Never run a generator indoors, in a garage, or on a porch.
- ❑ Keep a generator outside, at least 20 feet from the house.
- ❑ Point the exhaust away from every window, door, and vent.
- ❑ Never bring a grill, camp stove, or charcoal indoors.
- ❑ Never idle a car in a closed or attached garage.
- ❑ If an alarm sounds or people feel sick, get outside and call 911.

! An open door does not make it safe

This is the myth that kills. A generator or grill in a garage or on a porch is deadly even with the door open and a fan running. Outdoors, well away from the house, is the only safe place.

What carbon monoxide is

Understanding the danger is the first step to staying safe from it.

Carbon monoxide — CO for short — is a gas made whenever fuel burns: gasoline, propane, natural gas, charcoal, wood. You can't see it, smell it, or taste it, which is exactly what makes it so dangerous. It builds up in enclosed spaces and can overcome a person before they realize anything is wrong.

During outages, the risk spikes because people burn fuel in or near the house to make power, cook, or stay warm. Understanding where it comes from — and keeping all of it outdoors and away — is how you keep your home's air safe.

✓ Invisible, odorless, and preventable

You can't sense carbon monoxide, so you can't rely on noticing it. That's why alarms and firm rules matter — they do the sensing for you.

Carbon-monoxide alarms: your early warning

Because you can't sense the gas yourself, an alarm is your only real warning — and it's inexpensive.

A carbon-monoxide alarm sounds long before levels become dangerous, giving you time to get out and get air. Choose alarms with battery backup so they keep working during an outage — exactly when the risk is highest. Some run on batteries alone, which is fine and simple.

Think of them the way you think of smoke detectors: not optional, and worth having enough of. The safety agencies urge a working CO alarm in every home.

✓ **Battery backup is the key**

A plug-in alarm with no battery backup goes dead in the outage — right when you need it. Choose alarms that keep working on batteries when the power's out.

Where to put alarms, and testing them

A few in the right spots, tested regularly, is the whole job.

- Put an alarm on every level of the home, including the basement.
- Put one outside each sleeping area, so it wakes you.
- Follow the maker's instructions on height and placement.
- Keep them away from direct drafts, and out of dead-air corners.
- Test every alarm regularly by pressing its test button.
- Replace the batteries on a schedule, and the alarm itself per the maker's date.

✓ Test monthly, replace on schedule

Press the test button monthly, and note the alarm's replace-by date — CO alarms don't last forever. An easy reminder is to test when you pay a monthly bill.

The one generator rule that matters most

If you run a generator, this single rule prevents nearly every tragedy.

Run a generator outdoors only, at least 20 feet from the house, with the exhaust pointed away from every window, door, and vent — yours and the neighbor's. Never in a garage, shed, carport, basement, or on a porch, and never near an open window that could draw the exhaust back inside.

Our portable-generator guides cover safe placement, hookup, and use in full. Here, just hold onto the core rule: outside, far away, exhaust pointed away, every single time.

! Outside, 20-plus feet, exhaust away

There is no exception to this. A running generator too close to the house — or in any enclosed space — can fill your home with carbon monoxide in minutes.

The other outage sources of carbon monoxide

A generator isn't the only culprit — anything that burns fuel makes CO.

Source	The safe rule
Generator	Outdoors, 20+ feet, exhaust away
Grill or camp stove	Outdoors only, away from doors
Charcoal	Never indoors or in a garage — ever
Car engine	Never running in a closed garage
Unvented fuel heater	Only if truly rated for indoor use

The theme runs through all of them: keep combustion outside and away from the house. The one exception is heating equipment specifically rated and installed for indoor use, which our heating-safely guide covers carefully.

! Charcoal is especially deadly indoors

Charcoal grills and chimneys give off enormous amounts of carbon monoxide. They must never be used or even left to cool inside a house, garage, or tent.

Recognizing the warning signs

Know the symptoms, because they're easy to mistake for something ordinary.

Carbon-monoxide poisoning often feels like the flu without a fever: headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, confusion, and sleepiness. A telltale sign is several people — or pets — feeling sick at the same time, especially where something's been burning nearby.

If you suspect it, get everyone into fresh air immediately, then call 911 from outside. Don't go back in until responders say it's safe. When in doubt, treat it as CO and get out — it's far better to be safe.

! Fresh air first, then 911

If an alarm sounds or anyone feels dizzy, sick, or sleepy, get everyone outside first, then call 911. Never ignore an alarm or assume it's a false one.

The automatic CO shutoff on newer generators

Some modern generators add a helpful safety backstop — but it's not a license to bend the rules.

Many newer portable generators include a built-in carbon-monoxide sensor that shuts the engine off if CO climbs to a dangerous level nearby. Look for units built to the safety standards known as PGMA G300 or UL 2201. It's a genuine safety improvement and worth having.

But it's a backstop, not a reason to run a generator any closer to the house. The outdoor-only, 20-feet-away rule still applies. Think of the shutoff as a seatbelt, not permission to drive recklessly.

✓ A backstop, not a shortcut

An automatic shutoff is a fine feature, but it doesn't change where a generator belongs. Keep it outside and far away regardless of what sensors it has.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

Carbon-monoxide safety is identical everywhere — but rural homes tend to run generators more often and longer, so the rules get more use.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town, generators run less often and neighbors are close, which brings its own consideration: your exhaust affects the house next door, too.

- Mind where your exhaust drifts — toward a neighbor's window is a problem.
- Alarms on every level protect you whether or not you run a generator.
- Shorter outages mean less generator time, but the rules never relax.
- A gas furnace or water heater is a year-round CO source to alarm for.

If you are out in the country on a well

In the country, longer outages mean more hours of generator running, so safe placement and good alarms matter even more.

- More generator hours mean more chances for a mistake — stay strict.
- Place the generator well away from the house, with room to spare.
- Keep alarms fresh, since you rely on the generator more.
- Help is farther away, so prevention matters all the more.

★ Let's make your home CO-safe

Whether you run a generator now and then or all through a long outage, I'll help you set up alarms and safe habits. Call (330) 200-8042.

Making sure the alarm wakes you

Carbon monoxide is most dangerous at night, so the alarm has to wake the household.

Place alarms outside sleeping areas so a nighttime alarm reaches you. For anyone hard of hearing, look for alarms with extra-loud alerts or a bed-shaker and strobe accessory, so the warning still gets through in sleep. A CO alarm that no one hears can't do its job.

★ Let's cover the hard-of-hearing, too

If someone in your home sleeps deeply or is hard of hearing, I'll help you choose alarms that will still wake them. Call (330) 200-8042.

Keeping alarms working

An alarm only protects you if it's alive and current.

- Test each alarm monthly with its test button.
- Replace batteries on schedule — or when it chirps a low warning.
- Note each alarm's replace-by date; CO alarms wear out over years.
- Keep them dust-free and unobstructed.
- Consider combination smoke-and-CO alarms to cover both.

✓ Alarms don't last forever

A carbon-monoxide alarm has a service life of several years, printed on it. When it reaches that date, replace the whole unit — the sensor wears out even if the alarm still powers on.

Safe placement, and a word about neighbors

Where you set a generator affects more than your own home.

When you place a generator, look at where the exhaust will drift — not just away from your own windows and doors, but away from the neighbor's, too. In close quarters, your exhaust can reach the house next door, so give it real distance and thought.

The same goes for a grill or camp stove: set up well away from any home's windows and doors, yours or a neighbor's. Being a good neighbor here is also being a safe one.

✓ Think about the whole block

In a tight neighborhood, imagine where the wind carries the exhaust. Aim it toward open space, not toward anyone's windows.

Never backfeed your home's wiring

One dangerous shortcut deserves its own warning — it's a lethal one.

Never try to power your house by plugging a generator into a wall outlet or dryer plug with a double-ended cord — a so-called suicide cord. It can send deadly voltage back onto the utility lines, risking line workers' lives, and it exposes live prongs and creates a serious fire and shock hazard. It's also illegal.

To safely power hardwired parts of your home, a licensed electrician installs a transfer switch or interlock kit. Our generator, transfer-switch, and interlock guides cover this fully. For CO safety, the point stands: no dangerous shortcuts, ever.

! No suicide cords, ever

A double-male cord into an outlet is deadly to you and to line workers, and it's against code. Safe home hookup is always a licensed electrician's job.

A note on storing fuel safely

If you keep fuel for a generator, store it with the same care you give the exhaust.

Keep gasoline and propane in approved containers, stored outside the living space — a detached shed or garage away from the house, and away from any heat, flame, or pilot light. Our generator series covers fuel storage in detail. Safe fuel storage keeps fumes and fire risk out of your home.

! Keep fuel out of the living space

Never store gasoline or propane in the house or basement. Fuel vapors are both a fire hazard and a health one — keep them detached and ventilated.

A simple CO safety plan for the house

Make sure everyone in the home knows the rules and the response.

Walk the household through it: nothing that burns fuel comes inside or into the garage, the generator lives far outside, and if an alarm sounds, everyone goes outside to fresh air and someone calls 911. Make sure more than one person knows the rules, so safety doesn't rest on a single set of shoulders.

✓ Everyone knows the outside rule

The whole household — including visiting family and helpers — should know that generators, grills, and charcoal stay outside and far away. One person's slip can affect everyone.

The dangerous myths to unlearn

A few common beliefs are exactly backwards — and knowing them saves lives.

- Myth: an open door or window makes a garage safe. It does not.
- Myth: a fan clears the exhaust. It doesn't — CO still builds up.
- Myth: propane doesn't make CO. It makes less, but still deadly amounts.
- Myth: you'll smell it or feel it in time. You won't — it's odorless.
- Myth: a short run is fine indoors. Minutes can be enough to harm.

! Believe the alarm, not the myth

Every one of these myths has cost lives. The only safe approach is to keep all burning outside and far away, and to trust your alarms.

Lifesaving safety for very little

Carbon-monoxide alarms are among the cheapest lifesaving devices you can own.

A few battery-backup CO alarms cost little and protect your whole household for years.

There's no cheaper or more important piece of outage prep. If money's tight, alarms outside the bedrooms come first, then one per level.

✓ Alarms first, always

If your budget only stretches to one prep item this month, make it carbon-monoxide alarms. Nothing else you can buy matters more.

Your before-a-storm CO check

A quick safety pass before the power's likely to go out.

- ☐ Test every carbon-monoxide alarm and check its batteries.
- ☐ Confirm you have alarms on every level and outside bedrooms.
- ☐ Plan exactly where a generator will go — outside, 20+ feet away.
- ☐ Make sure fuel is stored safely outside the living space.
- ☐ Remind the household: nothing that burns comes indoors.
- ☐ Know the CO symptoms and the fresh-air-then-911 response.

✓ Test the alarms before the storm

A working alarm is worthless if its battery died months ago. Press the test button on each one before the weather turns.

Your printable CO-safety checklist

The rules that keep your home's air safe, in one place.

- ☐ Battery-backup CO alarms on every level and outside bedrooms.
- ☐ Alarms tested monthly and replaced by their date.
- ☐ Generator outdoors only, 20+ feet away, exhaust pointed away.
- ☐ No grill, camp stove, or charcoal indoors or in the garage.
- ☐ No car left idling in a closed or attached garage.
- ☐ No suicide cords — safe hookup is an electrician's job.
- ☐ Fuel stored safely outside the living space.
- ☐ Everyone knows the symptoms and the fresh-air-then-911 response.

★ Want help getting protected?

I'll help you place and test alarms and plan safe generator use — some of the most important help I offer. A first visit is a flat \$99. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The carbon-monoxide questions I'm asked most.

Q: Where should I put carbon-monoxide alarms?

On every level of your home, including the basement, and outside each sleeping area so one can wake you. Follow the maker's placement instructions, and choose alarms with battery backup so they work during an outage.

Q: Can I run a generator in the garage if the door is open?

No — never. An open door or a fan does not make an enclosed space safe. A generator belongs outdoors only, at least 20 feet from the house, with the exhaust pointed away from every window, door, and vent.

Q: What are the symptoms of carbon-monoxide poisoning?

It often feels like the flu without a fever: headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, confusion, and sleepiness — frequently in several people or pets at once. If you suspect it, get everyone to fresh air and call 911.

Q: Does the automatic shutoff on newer generators make them safe indoors?

No. The CO shutoff on units built to PGMA G300 or UL 2201 is a helpful backstop, but the outdoor-only, 20-feet-away rule still applies. It's a seatbelt, not permission to run the generator any closer.

Q: How often should I test and replace CO alarms?

Test each one monthly with its button and replace the batteries on schedule. The alarm itself wears out over several years — check its replace-by date and swap the whole unit when it's reached.

★ This is help worth asking for

Carbon-monoxide safety is one place I really encourage folks to get set up right. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and I'll help you protect your home.

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 carbon-monoxide safety 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

Stay Safe From Carbon Monoxide

Four rules that prevent nearly every tragedy



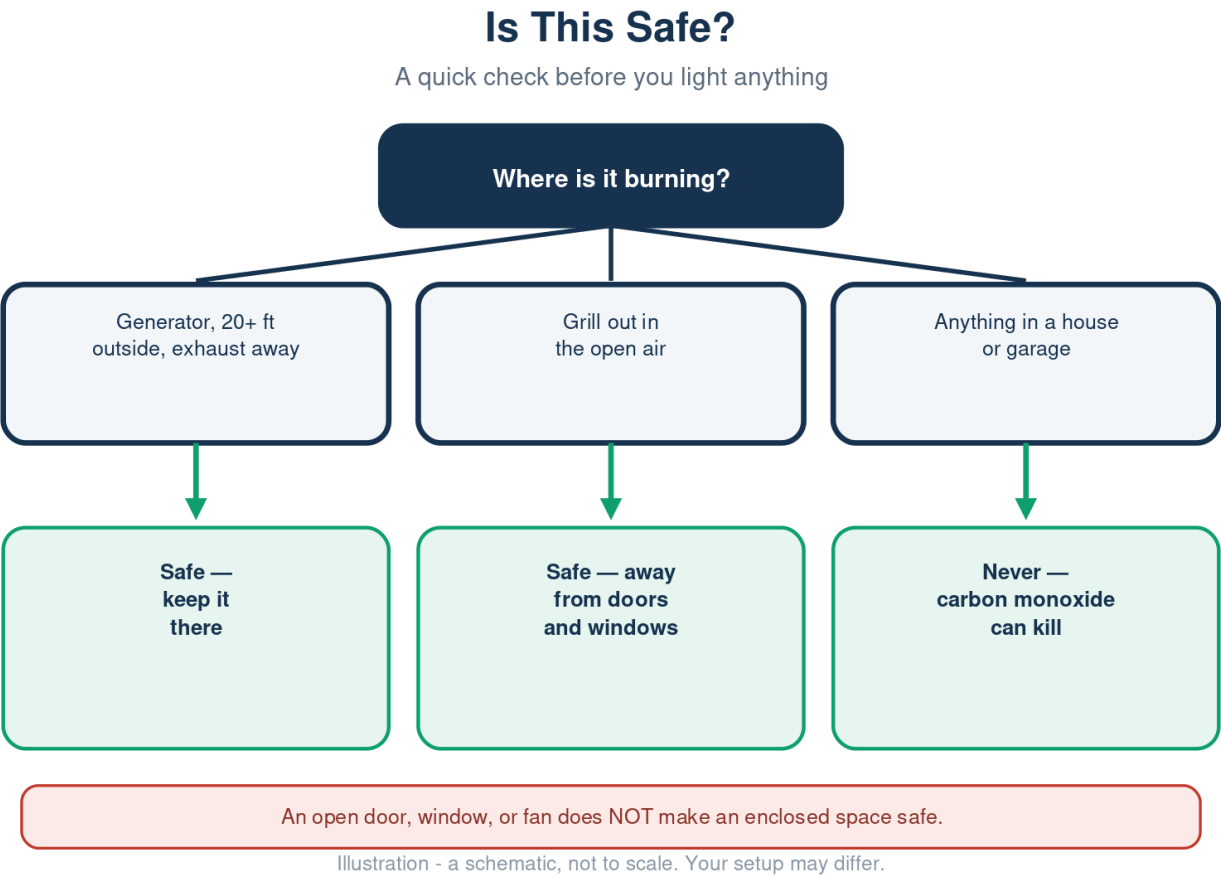
Anything that burns fuel gives off carbon monoxide.

Where CO Comes From in an Outage

Each has one safe rule

The safe rule	
Generator	Outdoors, 20+ ft away
Grill, camp stove	Outdoors, away from doors
Charcoal	Never indoors, ever
Car engine	Never in a closed garage

Keep all burning outside and away from the house.



Getting Your Alarms Right

A few in the right spots, kept current

What to do	
Every level	Including the basement
Outside bedrooms	So it wakes you
Battery backup	Works during an outage
Test monthly	Replace by its date

Alarms are among the cheapest lifesaving devices you can own.



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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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