



An Extended Guide · No. 1329

Using Your Transfer Switch During an Outage

Start to finish, step by calm step

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

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! Read this first — carbon monoxide is the real danger

A running generator's exhaust contains carbon monoxide — an invisible, odorless gas that can kill in minutes. Never run a generator indoors, in a garage, in a shed, or on a porch, not even with the door open and a fan going. Run it 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 each floor and outside the bedrooms. If an alarm sounds, or anyone feels dizzy, sick, or sleepy, get everyone into fresh air first and ask questions later. Using a transfer switch means running your generator, so the carbon-monoxide rules matter every single time — outdoors only, well away from the house.

The whole outage, step by calm step

This is the guide you'll actually reach for when the lights go out. It walks the whole sequence — from setting up the generator outside to switching safely back — so you can move through an outage calmly and confidently.

I'm Bill. Once your transfer switch is installed, using it is just a handful of steps done in the same order every time. This guide lays them out plainly. Read it now, practice once in daylight, and keep it near your panel — then you'll never have to remember it under stress.

Notice I put the carbon-monoxide reminder first. That's on purpose: your switch was installed by a licensed electrician, so the electrical part is safe — but the generator outside still makes deadly exhaust. That rule never bends. (And a reminder for the whole category: the panel wiring is always a licensed electrician's job, never yours or mine.)

★ Want to practice together?

I'm glad to come do a daylight practice run with you so the whole sequence feels familiar before you ever need it. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

The whole sequence, on one page

If you remember only these, you can run an outage safely.

- ❑ Set the generator up outside, well away from the house, exhaust pointed away from windows and doors.
- ❑ Start it with nothing connected and let it settle a minute.
- ❑ Plug the heavy cord into the generator, then the inlet box.
- ❑ Flip the transfer switch to generator power.
- ❑ Turn your circuits on one at a time, biggest first.
- ❑ When utility power returns, reverse it — circuits off, switch back, then shut down and cool.

✓ Same order, every time

The secret is doing it the same way each outage. Repetition turns it into second nature — no memorizing required.

A ready home makes this easy

The smoothest outages are won before they start. Just a quick reminder here — our storm-readiness guide goes deeper.

Ideally you've already got fresh fuel stored safely, the cord where you can find it, the generator ready, carbon-monoxide alarms tested, and your written switch-over steps taped near the panel. If a storm is coming, top off your fuel and do a quick equipment check. The more that's ready now, the less you'll scramble in the dark.

✓ Ready beats rushed

Five minutes of readiness before a storm saves a stressful half-hour during one. Our storm-readiness guide has the full checklist.

When the power first goes out

The first rule is the easiest to forget: don't rush.

Take a breath. A minute or two of calm won't hurt anything, and it keeps you safe. Grab a flashlight or lantern and your written steps. Confirm it's a real outage and not just a tripped breaker in your own home. If it's genuinely out, you're ready to begin the sequence you've practiced — no hurry, one step at a time.

✓ Calm is a safety feature

Most outage mishaps come from rushing. There's no prize for speed — steady and careful wins every time.

Setting the generator up outside — safely

This is the most safety-critical step of the whole outage, so it comes with the firmest rules.

Roll the generator to its spot well away from the house — the safety agencies advise at least 20 feet — on dry, level ground, with the exhaust pointed away from every window, door, and vent, yours and the neighbors'. Never in the garage, a shed, a carport, or on a porch, even with a door open. If it's wet out, shelter it only with a proper running-rated cover made for the purpose, never an enclosed space.

! This step is life or death

Carbon monoxide from a generator can kill in minutes. Outdoors only, far from the house, exhaust pointed away — every time, no exceptions, no matter the weather.

Starting the generator

Start it before you connect anything — it's gentler on the generator and on you.

With nothing plugged in, start the generator following its own instructions — choke and switch settings, or the electric-start button if it has one. Let it run and settle for a minute so it's producing steady power before you ask anything of it. Starting with no load is easier on the engine and lets you catch any problem before circuits are involved.

✓ No load at startup

Always start with nothing connected. It's the manufacturer's usual advice, and it keeps the startup smooth.

Connecting the cord

One heavy cord, two dry connections, and you're linked up.

- ❑ Make sure your hands, the cord ends, and the inlet are dry.
- ❑ Plug the cord into the generator's outlet.
- ❑ Plug the other end into the outdoor inlet box.
- ❑ Seat any twist-lock connector fully — push and turn until it locks.
- ❑ Follow your electrician's guidance if they specified a particular order.

! Dry hands, locked connections

Never connect with wet hands or a wet inlet, and always seat twist-lock connectors fully. Our inlet-box-and-cord guide covers this in detail.

Flipping the transfer switch

Now the part the whole system is built around — and it's the simplest step of all.

Go to your transfer switch and move it from utility to generator power. On a whole-panel switch that's one main handle; on an essential-circuits switch you'll flip individual circuits, which we do in the next step. The switch is built to prevent unsafe connections, so if it ever resists, stop and check your steps rather than forcing it.

! Never force a switch

Resistance is often the switch doing its safety job. If something won't move easily, stop and re-check — don't push through.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

The sequence is the same everywhere, but what you prioritize and cycle during the outage differs between town and country.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town, with city water still flowing, your focus is heat, food, and light. You'll likely bring up the furnace, the fridge, and a few lights and leave them running.

- Bring up the furnace first (its blower has the biggest surge), then the fridge, then lights.
- No well pump means less load-cycling — you can often run your list steadily.
- Keep an eye on the generator, but an in-town list is usually relaxed.
- Still set up outside, 20+ feet away — close neighbors make exhaust direction matter.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out on a well, water is the big job. You'll cycle the well pump — running it to refill pressure, then switching attention to other loads — since you don't need it pumping every minute.

- The well pump has a big starting surge — bring it up on its own, not alongside another motor starting.
- Cycle the pump: run it to build water, then focus power on the furnace, fridge, or sump.
- A sump pump may need to run during the same storm — plan for both motors.
- Store drinking water so you're not forced to run the pump at inconvenient moments.

★ On a well? Let's plan your load cycle

I'll help you work out a simple rhythm for cycling the well pump with your other circuits, so nothing overloads. Call (330) 200-8042.

Bringing circuits up one at a time

This is the habit that keeps your generator happy — and it's easy.

Turn your circuits on one at a time, not all at once, pausing between each. Start with the biggest surging load — often the furnace blower or a pump — so its starting jolt happens while the generator has the most to give, then add smaller loads. Bringing things up one by one means only one motor starts at a time, which is exactly what your generator is sized for. Our load-management guide goes deeper.

✓ **Biggest first, then pause**

Bring up the biggest load first, wait for the generator to steady, then add the next. That simple rhythm prevents most overloads.

Monitoring during the outage

Once you're running, a little attention keeps things smooth.

- **Listen to the generator** — it should run steadily; a strain or bog-down when something kicks on means you may be near its limit.
- **Watch your fuel** so you can plan a refuel before it runs dry.
- **Check the carbon-monoxide alarms** are on and quiet.
- **Keep the fridge and freezer closed** as much as possible.
- **Notice the weather** — keep the generator dry and its exhaust clear of snow.

✓ Your ears are a gauge

A generator that suddenly labors when a motor starts is telling you it's near its limit. Shed a load if you hear it struggle.

Refueling safely

Long outages mean refueling, and this is a step to treat with real care.

Turn the generator off and let it cool before adding fuel. Spilled fuel on a hot engine can ignite — so never refuel a running or hot generator. Refuel outdoors, away from any flame or cigarette, don't overfill, and wipe up spills before restarting. Yes, it means a brief pause in your power, but your fridge and freezer hold cold for a while, so a short break is fine and far safer.

! Off and cool before fuel

This is one of the most important safety rules there is: never add fuel to a running or hot generator. Turn it off, let it cool, then refuel.

Cycling loads through a long outage

If your list is bigger than your generator likes all at once, cycling is your friend.

You rarely need everything running every minute. Run the well pump to refill your water, then switch off that circuit and run the furnace and fridge. Let the freezer coast (it holds cold for a good while), then give it a turn. This gentle rotation lets a modest generator cover a long list comfortably — our load-management and sizing guides explain the idea in more depth.

✓ Rotate, don't overload

Think of your generator's power like a pitcher you pour where it's needed most, moment to moment. Cycling keeps everyone's needs met without straining it.

When utility power returns: switching back

When the lights out front flicker on, reverse everything calmly. There's no rush.

- ❑ Turn off the circuits you switched on, one at a time.
- ❑ Flip the transfer switch back to utility power.
- ❑ Let the generator run a minute with no load, then shut it off.
- ❑ Unplug the cord once the generator is fully off.
- ❑ Let the generator cool before refueling for storage or putting it away.

✓ Confirm the utility is really back

Give the returned power a few minutes to make sure it's steady — sometimes it flickers before it holds — before you fully shut down.

Shutting down and cooling off

A calm shutdown protects your gear and sets you up for next time.

After switching back, let the generator idle a moment to cool, then shut it off per its instructions. Let it cool fully before you handle it, refuel it for storage, or cover it. Coil the cord loosely and return it to its spot. This unhurried finish keeps the generator healthy and everything ready for the next outage.

✓ A good moment for a quick note

While it's fresh, jot down how long you ran and anything you noticed. A line in a notebook now helps you next time.

Running overnight and while you sleep

Long outages raise the question of leaving it running overnight. Here's how to think about it safely.

It's common to run a generator overnight during a long outage, and that's fine when it's set up correctly — outdoors, far from the house, exhaust pointed away, with working carbon-monoxide alarms inside. Make sure you have enough fuel to last, or plan a safe refuel. Keep it dry and its exhaust clear of drifting snow. Never move it closer or under cover to run overnight — the outdoor rule holds at 2 a.m. just as it does at noon.

! CO alarms are non-negotiable overnight

If you'll run a generator while anyone sleeps, working carbon-monoxide alarms inside are essential. They're your safety net when you can't be watching.

Written steps and a practice run

Two simple things make all of this reliable.

First, keep a written copy of these steps — in large, clear print — taped near your transfer switch. You should never have to recall the sequence from memory in the dark. Second, do a practice run in daylight at least once, ideally with anyone else who might need to operate it. Practice turns a list of steps into calm, confident muscle memory.

★ I'll write the steps with you

I'm glad to help you make a big-print, taped-up step sheet tailored to your exact switch, and practice it with you. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common mistakes during use

A few slip-ups cause most outage headaches. Sidestep these.

- **Rushing the setup** and cutting the generator's distance from the house — never trade safety for speed.
- **Turning everything on at once** and overloading — one at a time, biggest first.
- **Refueling hot** — always off and cool first.
- **Forgetting to switch back** and burning fuel needlessly after power returns.
- **Skipping the CO alarms** — test them before the season and keep them on.

! The two dangerous ones

Of these, cutting the generator's distance and refueling hot are the ones that can hurt you. The rest are just inconvenient. Never rush those two.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about using a transfer switch during an outage.

Q: What order do I do everything in?

Set up and start the generator outside, connect the cord, flip the switch, then bring circuits up one at a time — biggest first. Reverse it all when utility power returns.

Q: Can I refuel without shutting it off?

No — always turn it off and let it cool first. Fuel on a hot engine can ignite. Your fridge and freezer hold cold during a short pause.

Q: Can I run it overnight?

Yes, when it's set up safely outdoors, far from the house, with working CO alarms inside and enough fuel. Never move it closer or under cover to run overnight.

Q: What if a switch won't move?

Don't force it — the switch is built to prevent unsafe connections, so resistance often means it's doing its job. Stop and re-check your steps.

★ Want to walk through it live?

Call or text (330) 200-8042 during setup and I'll talk you through it, or come practice with you ahead of time.

How I help you use it with confidence

This is the guide that becomes real when the power's out — and I want you ready for that moment.

I'll make you a big-print step sheet for your exact switch, practice the whole sequence with you in daylight, and be a phone call away if you're ever unsure during an outage. My goal is that when the lights go out, you feel calm and capable, not frazzled. That confidence is the whole point.

★ Let's make outages feel easy

Call or text (330) 200-8042 and we'll turn this sequence into something you can do in your sleep — safely and calmly.

The short version to carry with you

If the steps blur in the moment, hold onto these.

- ❑ Generator outside, far from the house, exhaust away — always.
- ❑ Start with no load, connect the cord, flip the switch.
- ❑ Circuits on one at a time, biggest first; refuel only off and cool.
- ❑ When power returns: circuits off, switch back, then shut down and cool.

✓ Keep this guide by the panel

This is the one guide to keep right where you'll use it. A glance beats memory every 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 using your transfer switch during 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.

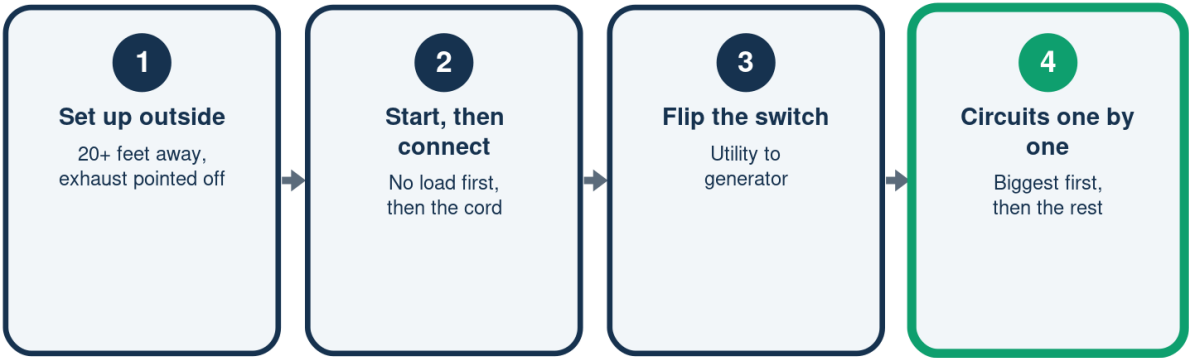
When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day,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

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The Outage Sequence

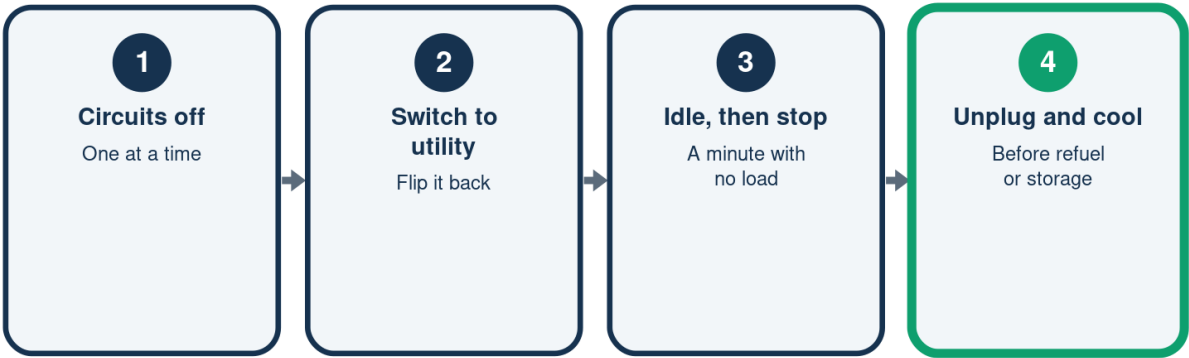
The same order, every single time



Reverse it all calmly when utility power returns.

Switching Back Safely

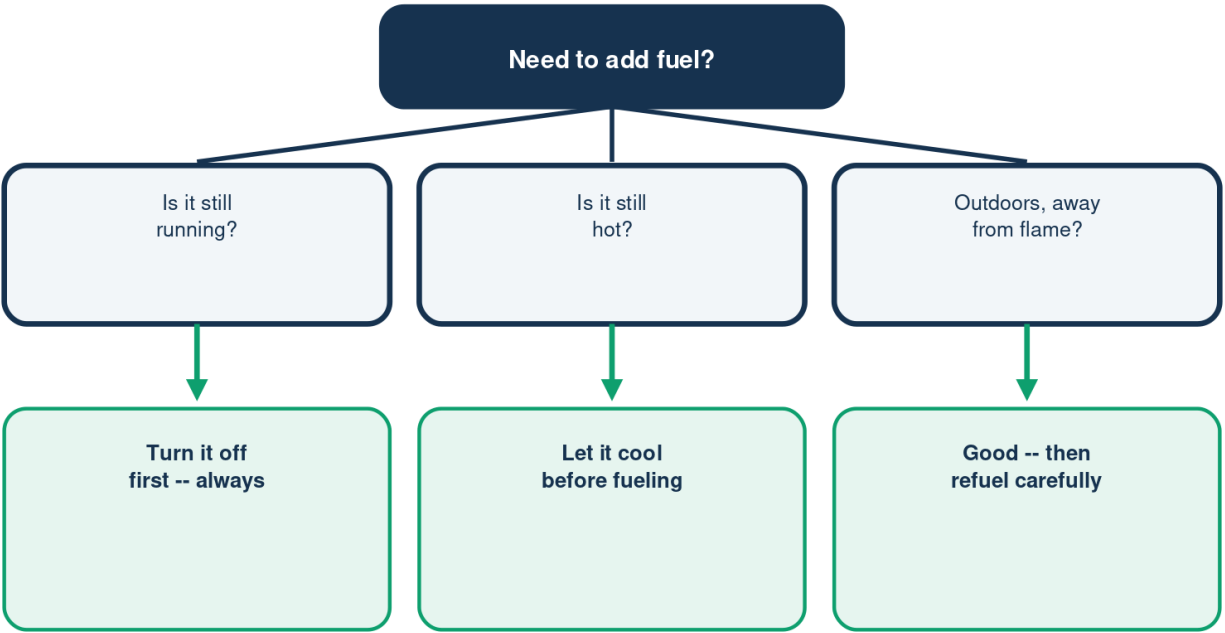
When the lights out front return



Give returned power a few minutes to prove it's steady first.

Safe to Refuel?

The rule that prevents fires

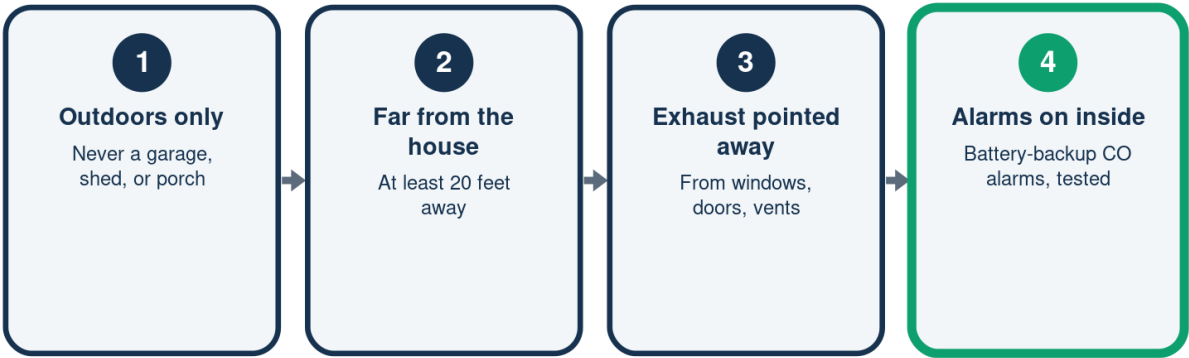


Fuel on a hot engine can ignite -- off and cool, every time.

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

The Rule That Never Bends

Carbon monoxide safety, every outage



A clean electrical hookup never changes the outdoor rule.



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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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