



An Extended Guide · No. 1709

Don't Forget the Septic Pump

The forgotten load in a
well-water outage plan

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! Read this first — on a well, no power means no water

On a home with a private well, a power outage isn't just dark — it's dry. The pump that lifts your water runs on your home's electricity, so when the power stops, every tap, toilet, and hose stops with it. Keep a few days of stored drinking water on hand as a backup you can count on — a common guideline is about a gallon per person per day. And know this from the start: a well pump is almost always a 240-volt appliance wired straight into your electrical panel, so any backup hookup for it is a licensed electrician's job. Never try to feed it with a cord or by backfeeding an outlet — that is unsafe, against code, and can put deadly voltage on the power lines outside. Most well-water outage planning is about the water coming in. This guide is about the water going out — because many rural homes have a septic pump that also stops when the power does, and it is easy to forget until it backs up.

Don't forget the septic pump

When we plan for outages, we think about drinking water and flushing. But if your home has a septic pump, the power going out can cause a backup at the other end — and this is the most-forgotten load of all.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. Plenty of well-water homes also have a septic system, and while many septic systems run on gravity alone, a good number rely on a pump. If yours does, that pump deserves a place in your outage plan — because a sewage backup is a memorable and unpleasant surprise.

The good news is that this is easy to handle once you know whether it applies to you. So the first job of this guide is simply to help you find out if you have a septic pump at all, then plan around it if you do.

★ Not sure if you have a septic pump?

This is a common question, and an important one. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I will help you figure out what kind of septic system you have.

The whole thing, in about a minute

If you remember only these things, your septic system will not catch you out.

- ❑ Not all septic systems need power — but many rural ones have a pump that does.
- ❑ If you have a septic pump and lose power, wastewater can eventually back up.
- ❑ Signs you have one: an outdoor control panel or a high-water alarm near the tank.
- ❑ During an outage, conserve what goes DOWN the drain — less flushing, laundry, and dishwasher.
- ❑ Include the septic or grinder pump when you plan your generator circuits.
- ❑ A high-water alarm is your warning that the pump tank is filling — do not ignore it.

✓ Two directions, not one

A complete well-water plan covers water in and water out. The septic pump is the 'out' side, and it is the piece almost everyone forgets.

First — do you even have a septic pump?

Many homes do not, and if yours is one of them, you can relax about this entirely. Here is how to tell.

The simplest, oldest septic systems work entirely by gravity: waste flows downhill from the house to the tank and out to the drain field, with no pump and no power involved. If that is your setup, an outage does not affect your septic system at all.

But many homes need a pump — when the drain field is uphill from the tank, when the ground is flat or low, or when the system is a mound or an advanced treatment type. These use an effluent or lift pump, a grinder pump, or an aerator, all of which run on electricity. If you have any of those, this guide is for you.

✓ Gravity or pumped?

If waste flows downhill all the way to your drain field, you likely have no pump to worry about. If any part goes uphill, or you have a mound or treatment system, you probably do.

How to tell for sure

A few simple signs reveal whether your system has a pump. You can check most of these yourself.

- **An outdoor control panel** — a small box on an exterior wall or a post near the tank, often with a light or a button.
- **A high-water alarm** — an alarm box (sometimes a red light and a buzzer) that warns when the pump tank is too full.
- **An air pump or blower** running near the tank — a sign of an aerobic treatment unit.
- **Your records or installer** — the paperwork from when the system was installed, or a call to the septic company, settles it.
- **A mound or raised drain field** — these almost always use a pump to lift the effluent.

If you see a control panel or alarm box, you have a pumped system. When in doubt, your septic service company can tell you in a moment from their records. It is worth knowing for certain, so you plan correctly.

★ I can help you look

If you are not sure what those boxes near your tank are, I am glad to help you identify them on a visit. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

What happens to a septic pump in an outage

Understanding what actually goes wrong helps you plan calmly rather than worry.

When the power goes out, a septic pump stops. Wastewater keeps arriving from the house, though, and collects in the pump tank. That tank holds a reserve — some room before it fills — so a short outage with normal use is usually fine. The trouble comes in a longer outage, or with heavy water use, when the tank fills faster than that reserve allows.

If the pump tank overfills and cannot pump out, wastewater can back up toward the house or surface near the tank. That is the unpleasant scenario we are avoiding. The two ways to avoid it are simple: use less water during the outage, and have a way to run the pump. We will cover both.

! The tank buys time, not forever

A pump tank's reserve gives you a cushion in a short outage. In a long one, or with heavy use, that cushion runs out — so conserve and plan to run the pump.

Conserve what goes down the drain

This is the flip side of conserving your drinking water, and it is your first, free defense.

During an outage with a septic pump, every gallon you send down the drain fills that pump tank a little more. So the same conservation that stretches your drinking water also protects your septic system: flush less often, skip the laundry, wash dishes in a basin rather than under a running tap, and keep showers short.

The good news is that in a well-water outage you already have less water flowing, since the incoming pump is off too. But if you are running a generator and using water freely, remember the septic side — do not send more down the drain than the stopped pump tank can hold. Our conserving-water guide has many more ideas.

✓ Less in, less out

The 'let it mellow' approach to flushing, a basin for dishes, and holding off on laundry all keep the septic tank from filling. Conservation protects both ends of your water at once.

Include the septic pump in your generator plan

If you have a generator, the septic pump is one more circuit worth including — and it is usually an easy one.

A septic effluent or lift pump is often a 120-volt load, and many grinder pumps too, though some are 240 volts. Either way, it can be one of the circuits your transfer switch or interlock can power. Running it for a little while during a generator session pumps down the tank and resets your cushion — just like running the well pump refills your water.

When you size your generator and plan your circuits, mention the septic pump to your electrician so it is included. It usually adds only a modest load. Our sizing guide and our guide on connecting backup power cover fitting it in.

✓ One more circuit to name

When you set up your transfer switch or interlock, ask that the septic pump be one of the circuits you can power. A short run during a generator session keeps the tank in check.

Your early warning — the high-water alarm

If you have a pumped septic system, this little alarm is your friend. Learn what it is telling you.

Many septic pump systems have a high-water alarm — a light and buzzer that goes off when the pump tank is filling higher than it should. In normal times, it warns you of a pump problem. During an outage, it is telling you the tank is getting full because the pump has not been running. Either way, it means: pump the tank down or stop adding water.

Know where your alarm is and what it sounds like before you ever need it. Note that the alarm itself may need power — some have a battery backup, some do not — so in an outage you may need to check the tank level yourself if the alarm is dark. Your septic company can tell you how yours works.

! Do not ignore the alarm

A high-water alarm is never something to silence and forget. It means the tank is filling. In an outage, run the pump on your generator or stop sending water down the drain until you can.

A note on aerobic treatment systems

Some advanced septic systems have an extra power need worth understanding.

An aerobic treatment unit uses an air pump or blower to keep helpful bacteria working, treating the wastewater more thoroughly than a basic system. That aerator runs on electricity, so in an outage it stops too. A short outage does not harm the system, but a long one without air can set the treatment process back for a while after power returns.

If you have an aerobic system, it is worth including its blower in your generator plan alongside any pump, and asking your septic professional how long yours can safely go without power. They can advise on your particular unit — systems vary, so a straight answer from your installer beats a guess.

✓ Ask your septic pro about your unit

If you have an aerobic treatment system, ask your septic company how long it can go without power and whether to prioritize its blower on your generator. Their answer is specific to your system.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

The septic pump is a rural and edge-of-town concern — here is how it differs by home.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs on municipal sewer, your wastewater flows to the city's system, which does not depend on your home's power. A power outage does not cause a backup, and there is no septic pump of yours to worry about — though a basement sump pump is a separate flooding concern worth a thought.

- On municipal sewer, an outage does not back up your wastewater.
- You have no septic pump of your own to include in a generator plan.
- A basement sump pump is a different concern — worth backing up if you have one.
- Your outage planning can focus on comfort, food, and water in.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country on a well, you are very likely on septic too — and if that system has a pump, the outage affects both ends of your water. This is squarely a rural guide.

- Find out whether your septic system has a pump — many rural ones do.
- If it does, conserve what goes down the drain and include the pump in your generator plan.
- Know your high-water alarm and check the tank level in a long outage.
- Mound and aerobic systems almost always need power — plan accordingly.

★ Well and septic go together out here

Most homes on a well are on septic too. Call me at (330) 200-8042 and we will make sure your outage plan covers the water going out as well as coming in.

A word on grinder pumps

Some homes have a grinder pump, which deserves a special mention because it cannot be ignored in an outage.

A grinder pump grinds and pumps wastewater, and it is common where the house sits below the sewer or drain field and everything must be lifted. Homes with a grinder pump depend on it entirely — there is no gravity fallback — so an outage stops all wastewater from leaving, and the holding capacity before a backup can be limited.

If you have a grinder pump, it belongs high on your generator priority list, right alongside the well pump. Conserving water going down the drain matters even more, and knowing your holding capacity and alarm is important. Your septic professional can tell you the specifics for your system.

! A grinder pump is not optional

With a grinder pump there is no gravity backup — if it is off, waste cannot leave. Prioritize it on your generator and conserve hard during an outage.

The sump pump — a close cousin

While we are on pumps that protect your home, the basement sump pump is worth a mention, because it fails the same way.

If you have a basement or crawl space with a sump pump, it keeps groundwater from flooding in. Like the septic pump, it runs on electricity and stops in an outage — and a storm that knocks out your power is often exactly when groundwater is highest and the sump pump is needed most. That is an unlucky combination.

A sump pump can be included in your generator circuits, and there are also battery-backup sump pumps made for just this problem. If a wet basement is a risk at your home, plan for the sump pump alongside the septic and well pumps. It is the same idea: a pump that protects your home needs a power plan.

✓ Storms bring water and outages together

The sump pump is most needed during the very storms that cause outages. If you rely on one, include it in your generator plan or consider a battery backup made for sump pumps.

A simple septic outage plan

Pulling it together, here is a plan for the water going out, to sit alongside your plan for the water coming in.

- ❑ Know whether you have a septic pump, grinder pump, or aerobic system.
- ❑ If you do, include it in your generator circuits, sized in by your electrician.
- ❑ During an outage, conserve what goes down the drain — flush less, hold the laundry.
- ❑ Know where your high-water alarm is and check the tank in a long outage.
- ❑ Run the pump during a generator session to draw the tank back down.

★ Let's cover both ends of your water

A complete plan protects the water coming in and the water going out. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and we will make sure your septic side is covered too.

Everyday septic care that helps in an outage

A healthy septic system handles an outage better. A little routine care pays off when the power goes.

Keeping your septic system pumped out and serviced on schedule means the tank is not already near full when an outage hits — giving you more cushion. Being mindful of what goes down the drain year-round, and fixing running toilets or dripping fixtures, keeps the system from working harder than it must.

Knowing your system — where the tank and pump are, when it was last serviced, and how the alarm works — means you are not learning it for the first time during an outage. Keep those details with your home papers, alongside your well and generator information.

✓ A serviced tank has more cushion

A septic system pumped and serviced on schedule starts an outage with more room to spare. Regular care is quiet insurance against a backup.

A few common myths, gently corrected

The septic side comes with its own myths. Here is the honest version.

The myth	The honest truth
All septic systems work without power.	Many do, but pumped, mound, grinder, and aerobic systems need it.
A backup can't happen in a short outage.	The tank buys time, but heavy use or a long outage fills it.
My generator plan only needs the well pump.	If you have a septic or grinder pump, include that too.
The high-water alarm is just a nuisance.	It is a real warning that the tank is filling — act on it.

! The 'no power needed' myth catches people

Assuming your septic needs no power is fine only if you have confirmed it. Check for a control panel or alarm — if they are there, you have a pump to plan for.

What I can do — and what I bring in a pro for

Here is my honest role with the septic side of your plan.

- **What I do:** help you find out whether you have a septic pump, include it in your outage plan and generator circuits, and understand your alarm.
- **A licensed electrician does** the wiring to include the septic or grinder pump in your transfer switch or interlock.
- **A septic professional** services the system, tells you your holding capacity, and handles the pump and alarm themselves.

I am a patient tech helper with 30-plus years of experience, not a licensed electrician or septic contractor — and I will always be clear about that. What I bring is making sure the septic pump does not get forgotten in your plan, and lining up the right pro for the hands-on parts.

★ The forgotten load, remembered

The septic pump is the piece almost everyone overlooks. Let me make sure yours is covered. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

The mistakes that catch people out

Most septic surprises in an outage come from a few avoidable oversights.

- **Not knowing** whether you even have a septic pump until it backs up.
- **Leaving it off the generator plan**, so only the well pump is covered.
- **Using water freely** on a generator while forgetting the stopped septic pump.
- **Ignoring the high-water alarm** or not knowing where it is.
- **Starting an outage with a near-full tank** because service was overdue.

Our common-mistakes guide covers each in detail. Simply knowing your system and including its pump in your plan avoids nearly all of them.

✓ **Knowing is half the battle**

The single best fix is finding out today whether you have a septic pump. If you do, the rest is easy planning; if you do not, you can cross it off entirely.

Questions worth asking your septic company

A few good questions tell you exactly what to plan for.

Q: Does my septic system have a pump?

The key question. A gravity system needs no power; a pumped, mound, grinder, or aerobic system does.

Q: How long can it go without power before a backup?

Ask about the pump tank's holding capacity with normal use, so you know your cushion in an outage.

Q: Is the pump 120 or 240 volts, and how much power does it need?

This helps your electrician include it in your generator plan and size things correctly.

Q: How does my high-water alarm work, and does it have battery backup?

So you know your warning system and whether to check the tank yourself in an outage.

✓ Write the answers down

Keep your septic system's details — pump type, capacity, alarm — with your well and generator papers. A complete picture makes outage planning simple.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about septic pumps and outages.

Q: Will my septic back up if the power goes out?

Only if your system has a pump and the outage is long enough, or your water use heavy enough, to fill the pump tank. Gravity systems are unaffected. Conserving and running the pump on a generator prevent it.

Q: How do I know if I have a septic pump?

Look for an outdoor control panel or a high-water alarm box near the tank, an air blower for an aerobic unit, or a mound drain field. Your septic company can confirm from their records.

Q: Can I run my septic pump on my generator?

Yes — it can be one of your transfer switch or interlock circuits. A short run during a generator session draws the tank back down. Have your electrician include it.

Q: What should I do if the high-water alarm goes off in an outage?

Stop sending water down the drain and run the pump on your generator to draw the tank down. Do not ignore it — it means the tank is filling.

★ Still have a question? That is what I am here for

There is no silly question. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we will cover your septic side together.

A gentle word about cost

Covering the septic pump usually costs very little on top of what you are already planning.

If you already have a generator and a transfer switch or interlock, adding the septic pump as one of the circuits is often a small extra — sometimes just including it when the electrician sets things up. Conserving water during an outage costs nothing at all. The expensive thing is a sewage backup, which this modest planning avoids.

I do not sell generators or septic equipment and earn nothing on the work, so my advice is just honest advice. Making sure the septic pump is on your list is some of the cheapest insurance in your whole outage plan — it mostly costs a little forethought.

★ Cheap insurance against a nasty surprise

A backed-up septic system is a costly, unpleasant mess. Planning for the pump costs little. My first visit is a flat \$99 with a 30-day come-back-free guarantee, and I will coordinate your electrician and septic pro.

Bringing it all together

If this guide did its job, the water going out is now part of your plan. Here it is in three lines.

- ❑ **Find out:** whether your septic system has a pump, grinder pump, or aerator.
- ❑ **If it does:** include it in your generator plan and know your high-water alarm.
- ❑ **During an outage:** conserve what goes down the drain, and pump the tank down in generator sessions.

The septic pump is the most-forgotten piece of a well-water outage plan — and one of the easiest to cover once you know it is there. Handle the water going out as well as coming in, and your plan is truly complete.

★ And whenever you would like a hand

That is exactly what I do — come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

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 keeping your septic pump covered 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

Does My Septic Need Power?

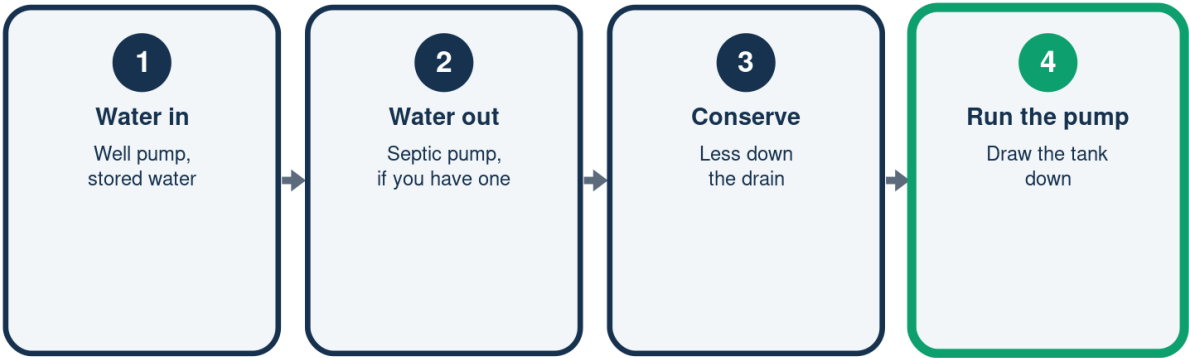
Gravity systems don't; many others do

	No power needed	Power needed
Gravity system	Flows downhill	No pump
Pumped / lift	Uphill field	Needs a pump
Grinder pump	-	Needs a pump
Mound / aerobic	-	Needs power

Check for a control panel or high-water alarm.

Cover Both Ends of Your Water

In and out, not just in



A full plan protects both ends.

Signs You Have a Septic Pump

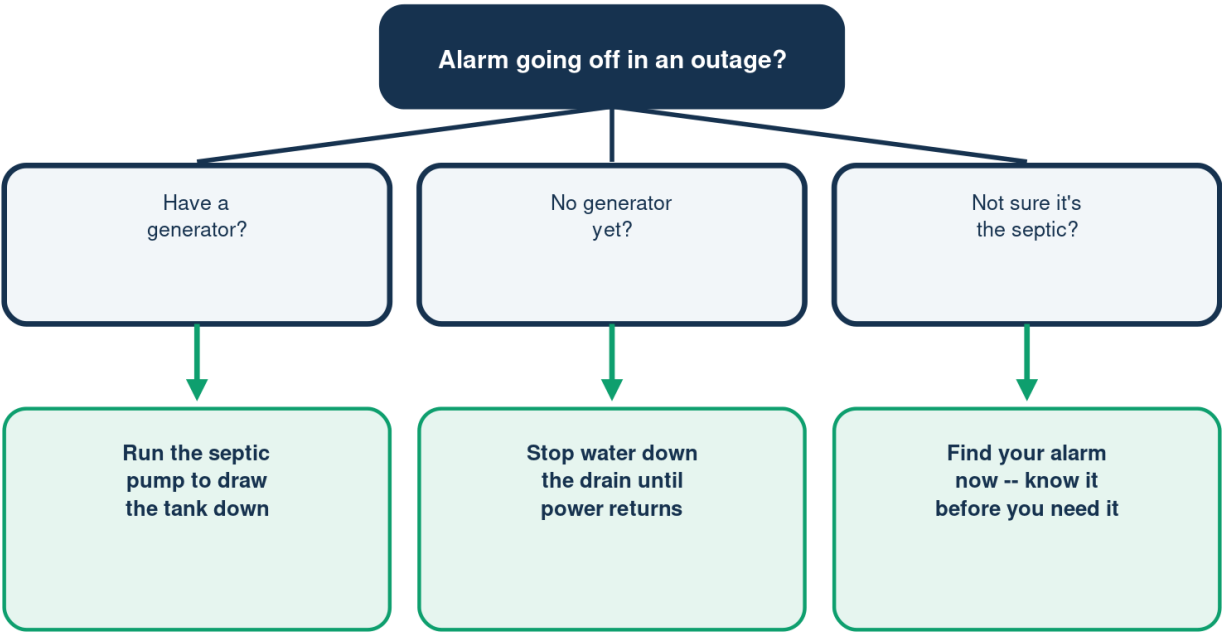
What to look for around the tank

Sign			What it means
Control panel	Outdoor box		Pumped system
High-water alarm	Light + buzzer		Pump tank
Air blower	Running near tank		Aerobic unit
Mound field	Raised mound		Lift pump

Any of these means power is part of your septic system.

The High-Water Alarm Sounds

What it's telling you in an outage



Never just silence a high-water alarm -- the tank is filling.

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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