



An Extended Guide · No. 1716

Testing Your Well-Water Backup 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. A backup plan you have never tried is really just a hope. One calm-day dry-run turns it into a plan you can trust — and it is the single most valuable hour you can spend on your whole setup.

Testing your well-water backup plan

You have stored water, a generator, and a safe hookup. But have you ever run the whole thing together? This guide walks you through a calm-day test, so the first real outage is not the first real trial.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. Of all the advice in this category, this is the one folks skip most — and regret most. It is human nature to set up the gear and assume it works. But the middle of a dark, stormy outage is the worst possible time to discover a problem.

The fix costs nothing but an hour on a sunny afternoon. Run the whole plan once, calmly, and you will find any surprises when they are easy to fix — and you will know, deep down, that your plan works. That confidence is worth a great deal.

★ Want company for your first test?

A first test is more reassuring with someone beside you. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I will walk through it with you, start to finish.

The whole thing, in about a minute

If you remember only these things, your plan will be one you can trust.

- ❑ A plan you have never tested is only a hope — run it once on a calm day.
- ❑ Start the generator outdoors, switch over safely, and watch water come back at the tap.
- ❑ Listen for a clean pump start, not a strain and a stall.
- ❑ Time how long things take and note fuel use, so you can plan.
- ❑ Teach the household and check your CO alarms and kit while you are at it.
- ❑ Re-test twice a year — tie it to the clock change so you remember.

✓ The most valuable hour you'll spend

One calm-day dry-run tells you more than any spec sheet. It is the single best hour you can give your backup plan.

Why testing matters so much

It is tempting to skip — everything looks fine. Here is why running it for real is worth the trouble.

Gear that sits unused can surprise you: a generator that will not start on old fuel, a pump that trips a generator you thought was big enough, a transfer switch you are unsure how to operate, a stored-water supply gone stale. None of these show themselves until you actually run the plan — and you do not want to meet them for the first time in a storm.

A calm-day test finds every one of these while they are easy, cheap, and unstressful to fix. It also builds your confidence and skill, so when a real outage comes, you are calm and practiced instead of anxious and guessing. That difference is enormous when the pressure is on.

✓ Find surprises when they're easy

Every problem is smaller on a sunny afternoon than in a dark storm. Testing simply moves the surprises to the easy day.

Before you start the test

A few minutes of setup makes the test smooth and safe. Here is how to begin.

- ❑ Pick a calm, dry day with no storm about — you want easy conditions.
- ❑ Have your written plan or checklist in hand to follow along.
- ❑ Check the generator's oil and fresh fuel before starting.
- ❑ Make sure you know where your transfer switch or interlock is and how it works.
- ❑ Have a helper if you can — a second set of hands and eyes is reassuring.
- ❑ Give yourself an unhurried hour — there is no rush.

Treat it like a friendly rehearsal, not an exam. The goal is to walk through your real outage steps exactly as you would for real, so any gap shows up now. Our game-plan and checklist guides give you the steps to follow.

✓ Follow your real checklist

Run the test using the exact checklist you would use in a real outage. That way you are testing the plan, not just the gear — and practicing the steps at the same time.

Test the generator and the hookup

This is the heart of the test — running the generator through your real hookup, safely.

- ❑ Set the generator outdoors, well away from the house, exhaust pointed away — exactly as in a real outage.
- ❑ Start it and let it settle for a moment.
- ❑ Connect it to the inlet box with the proper cord.
- ❑ Switch over at the panel through your transfer switch or interlock.
- ❑ Confirm the circuits you expect come alive.

Even though it is only a test, follow every safety rule for real: outdoors only, never a backfeed. A running generator makes carbon monoxide whether it is a test or an emergency, so treat it with the same respect. Our carbon-monoxide and connecting-backup guides cover the safety in full.

! It's a test, but the rules are real

A generator produces deadly carbon monoxide even during a practice run. Run it outdoors only, well away from the house, every time — test or no test.

Watch — and listen to — the pump start

This is the moment of truth for a well home. Pay attention to how the pump starts.

With the generator running and the switch thrown, turn off big loads and switch on the pump circuit. Listen: a healthy start is the generator working harder for a moment at the surge, then settling as the pump runs and water returns. That is what you want to hear and see — water back at the tap, at good pressure.

A troubled start sounds different: the generator bogging down, straining, or tripping, with the pump humming but not delivering water. That tells you the generator may be undersized for the surge, or something needs attention. Far better to learn it now than in an outage. Our sizing and soft-starter guides explain the fixes.

✓ A clean start is the goal

You want a brief moment of the generator working hard, then smooth running and water at the tap. Straining, stalling, or no water means something to sort out — on this easy day.

Time it and take notes

A test is also a chance to learn the practical numbers you will want during a real outage.

- **How long** the whole start-up sequence takes, from generator to water back.
- **How the generator handles** the pump plus a few other loads at once.
- **Roughly how much fuel** a session uses, so you can plan how much to store.
- **How long the pressure tank** gives water before the pump needs to run again.
- **Anything awkward** — a stiff switch, a hard-to-reach cord, a confusing step.

Jot these on your checklist. Knowing that a session uses a certain amount of fuel, or that the switch-over takes a few minutes, turns a real outage from guesswork into a routine. It also tells you whether to store more fuel or smooth out an awkward step.

✓ Write down what you learn

The numbers from your test — timing, fuel use, tank reserve — are gold for planning. Record them on your checklist so future-you has them ready.

Test the other layers too

The generator is the star, but a full test checks every layer of your plan.

- ❑ **Stored water** — check the amount and freshness; rotate any that is old.
- ❑ **The septic pump** — if you have one, confirm it runs on the generator and know its alarm.
- ❑ **Carbon-monoxide alarms** — test them and check their batteries.
- ❑ **Your kit** — flashlights work, cord is present, buckets and hygiene kit are stocked.
- ❑ **A hand pump** — if you have one, pump some water so you know its feel and priming.
- ❑ **Winter items** — if relevant, confirm backup heat works and you know how to drain pipes.

A plan is only as strong as its weakest layer, so a full test looks at all of them. Most take just a minute to check, and finding a dead flashlight or a stale water jug now is far better than during an outage.

✓ Check every layer, not just the generator

Stored water, the septic pump, alarms, the kit — a quick check of each makes sure the whole plan is ready, not just the star player.

Teach the whole household

A plan only you can run is a plan that fails the day you are not home. The test is the perfect time to teach it.

Bring your spouse, a family member, or a helpful neighbor into the test and let them do the steps too — start the generator, switch over, start the pump. What is obvious to you after doing it may be a mystery to someone who has only watched. Hands-on practice is how it sticks.

This matters especially if you travel, or if the person most likely to be home is not the one who set things up. An outage does not wait for the expert to be present. A household where two or three people can run the plan is a household that is truly ready.

✓ Two people who can run it, not one

Teach at least one other person to run the whole plan hands-on. It is the difference between a plan that works only when you are home and one that always works.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

Testing matters for any backup setup, but a well home has more to check.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs on city water, a test is mainly about the generator and the safe switch-over for your comfort loads — the furnace, fridge, and lights. There is no well pump to watch start, which makes the test simpler.

- Test the generator, the switch-over, and your comfort loads.
- No 240-volt pump to watch, so the test is simpler.
- Still follow every safety rule — outdoors only, never a backfeed.
- Test a sump pump on the generator if you rely on one.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country on a well, the test has a starring moment — watching the pump start cleanly and water return — plus the septic pump, stored water, and winter items. This is where a full test really pays off.

- Watch and listen to the pump start — the key moment for a well home.
- Test the septic pump, stored water, and any hand pump too.
- In winter, confirm backup heat and know how to drain pipes.
- Note timing and fuel use for the longer outages rural lines bring.

★ Let's test your whole plan together

A well home has several layers worth checking. Call me at (330) 200-8042 and we will run a full test so you know every part works.

If something does not work

Finding a problem is not a failure of the test — it is the whole point. Here is what to do with what you find.

- **Generator won't start** — often old fuel or a flat battery; a little maintenance usually fixes it.
- **Generator bogs down at the pump** — it may be undersized for the surge; ask about a soft starter or a larger unit.
- **Pump hums but no water** — stop and have a well pro check the pump; do not keep trying.
- **Unsure about the hookup** — have a licensed electrician confirm it is safe and show you how it works.
- **Stale or short water supply** — rotate and top up your stored water.

Each of these is far easier to sort out now than during an outage. Note what you found, fix what you can, and call the right pro for the rest. Then, when it is fixed, test again to be sure. Our sizing, soft-starter, and pump-protection guides cover the common fixes.

★ A failed test is a gift

Better to find a problem on a sunny day than in a storm. If your test turns something up, call or text (330) 200-8042 and we will get it sorted before it matters.

How often to test

One test is wonderful; a habit is better. Here is a sensible rhythm.

Aim to run a full test at least twice a year — tying it to the clock change, like your smoke-alarm batteries, makes it easy to remember. Between full tests, it is worth briefly starting the generator now and then to keep it healthy and the fuel fresh; many folks do a quick monthly run. Gear that runs regularly is gear that starts when you need it.

A standby generator largely tests itself with a weekly self-run, but it is still worth confirming once or twice a year that it carries your real loads, including the pump. Whatever your setup, a regular rhythm keeps small problems from becoming outage surprises.

✓ Tie it to the clock change

Test your backup plan when you change your clocks, alongside your smoke-alarm batteries. Twice a year keeps everything ready without any guesswork.

Keep a simple test log

A few notes each time turn testing into a record you can learn from.

Jot down the date, what you tested, how it went, the timing and fuel use, and anything you fixed or want to watch. Over time this log shows you patterns — a generator getting harder to start, a water supply that needs more frequent rotation — before they become problems. It also reminds you when you last tested.

Keep the log with your checklist and home papers. It need not be fancy — a few lines on the back of your checklist will do. The point is simply to remember, and to catch slow changes you might otherwise miss. Our checklist guide has a spot for this.

✓ A few lines each time

Date, what you tested, how it went, anything to watch. That simple log catches slow problems and reminds you when you last checked.

Putting it together — the full dry-run

Here is the whole test as one sequence, the way I would run it with you on a calm afternoon.

- ❑ Follow your real checklist from the top, as if the power just went out.
- ❑ Capture water, then set up and start the generator outdoors.
- ❑ Switch over safely and start the pump; watch and listen for a clean start.
- ❑ Confirm your other essentials — fridge, furnace, septic pump — run as expected.
- ❑ Time it, note fuel use, and check stored water, alarms, and the kit.
- ❑ Teach a helper, then switch back to the grid and shut down.
- ❑ Log what you found, and fix or note anything that needs it.

★ I will run it with you the first time

The first full dry-run is the most reassuring thing you can do — and even better with a hand. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and we will do it together.

A few common myths, gently corrected

Testing comes wrapped in a few excuses. Here is the honest version of each.

The myth	The honest truth
It's new, so it must work.	New gear still needs a real run — sizing and hookup can surprise you.
I'll figure it out during an outage.	A storm is the worst time to learn — practice on a calm day.
Testing wastes fuel.	A short test uses little, and it can save a failed outage.
I tested it once, so I'm set forever.	Gear and fuel age — re-test twice a year to stay ready.

✓ **The best time to test is now**

Every excuse for not testing dissolves against one fact: a plan proven on a calm day is one you can trust in a storm. Do it now.

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

Here is my honest role in testing your plan.

- **What I do:** run the full dry-run with you, help you read what you find, teach the household, and set up a testing rhythm and log — at your pace.
- **A licensed electrician** confirms the hookup is safe and fixes any wiring issue the test reveals.
- **A well or pump professional** handles a pump that will not start or deliver water.

I am a patient tech helper with 30-plus years of experience, not a licensed electrician or well contractor — and I will always be clear about that. What I bring is a calm, friendly hand for that first test and help acting on whatever it turns up.

★ Reassurance is the whole point

Whether your test goes perfectly or turns something up, you end up more confident either way. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and let's give your plan a proper run.

The mistakes that catch people out

Most testing regret comes from a few simple slip-ups.

- **Never testing at all** — and meeting every surprise during a real outage.
- **Testing the gear but not the plan** — start the generator but never run the pump through the real hookup.
- **Testing alone** — so no one else in the household can run it.
- **Testing once and forgetting** — as fuel and gear quietly age.
- **Not writing down** what you learned, so the lessons are lost.

Our common-mistakes guide covers the broader outage mistakes. For testing, the fixes are simple: run the whole plan, with a helper, on a schedule, and log it.

✓ Test the plan, not just the gear

Starting the generator is not a full test. Run the whole sequence — through the real hookup, watching the pump start — to know your plan truly works.

Questions worth asking during a test

As you run your dry-run, these questions make sure it is a real test, not just a gesture.

Q: Did the pump start cleanly and deliver water?

A brief hard moment then smooth running and good pressure is what you want. Straining or no water means something to fix.

Q: Could someone else run this without me?

If not, teach them now, during the test. A plan only you can run is not ready.

Q: How long did it take, and how much fuel?

Note these — they tell you how much fuel to store and how a real outage will flow.

Q: Did every layer check out — water, septic, alarms, kit?

A full test looks at all of them, not just the generator. Fix or note anything that fell short.

✓ A real test answers real questions

If your test cannot answer these, run it more fully. The point is to know, with confidence, that your whole plan works.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about testing a backup plan.

Q: How do I test my backup plan?

On a calm day, follow your real checklist: capture water, start the generator outdoors, switch over safely, start the pump, and watch water return. Check the other layers, time it, and teach a helper.

Q: How often should I test?

A full test at least twice a year — tie it to the clock change — plus a brief generator run now and then to keep it healthy and the fuel fresh.

Q: Is it safe to run the generator just for a test?

Yes, if you follow the real rules: outdoors only, well away from the house, and never a backfeed. Carbon monoxide is just as dangerous during a test.

Q: What if the pump won't start during the test?

That is exactly what a test is for. It may mean an undersized generator (ask about a soft starter or larger unit) or a pump issue (call a well pro). Far better found now than in a storm.

★ 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 make sure your plan is proven and ready.

A gentle word about cost

Testing is nearly free, and it protects everything else you have invested in your backup plan.

A test costs a little fuel and an hour of your time — that is all. Yet it protects the real money you have put into a generator, a hookup, and your water plan, by making sure they actually work when you need them. A generator that will not start in an outage is money wasted; a test is how you make sure that never happens.

I do not sell any gear and earn nothing on your setup, so my advice is just honest advice: testing is the cheapest insurance on your whole investment. If you would like a hand with that first full dry-run, my first visit is a flat \$99 with a 30-day come-back-free guarantee.

★ Cheap insurance on everything else

An hour and a little fuel protect all the money and effort in your backup plan. It is the best-value hour in this whole category. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Bringing it all together

If this guide did its job, you will run your plan before you ever need it. Here it is in three lines.

- ❑ **Run it once now:** a full dry-run on a calm day, following your real checklist.
- ❑ **Watch and learn:** a clean pump start, the timing, the fuel, and every layer.
- ❑ **Make it a habit:** re-test twice a year, teach the household, and log it.

A tested plan is the difference between hoping and knowing. Give your setup one honest hour on a sunny day, and you will face the next outage calm, practiced, and sure. That confidence is the real reward.

★ 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 testing your backup plan before you need it 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.

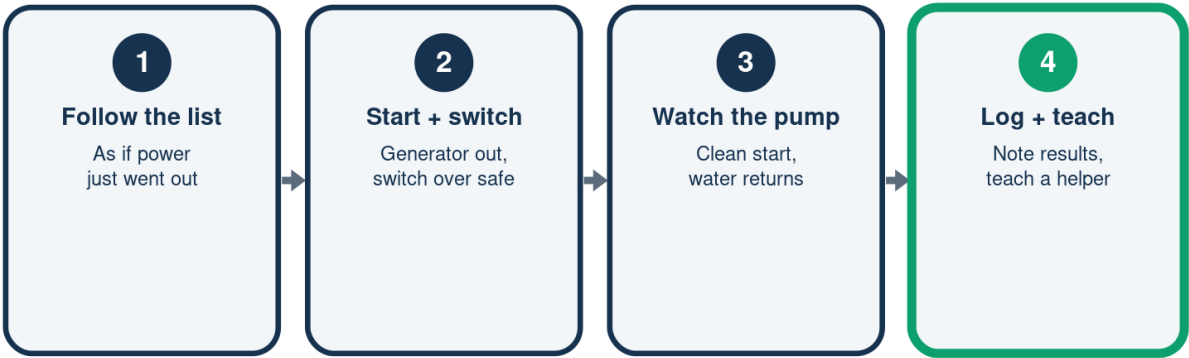
When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day,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

The Full Dry-Run

Run it once on a calm day



Test the plan, not just the gear.

A Clean Start vs. a Troubled One

What to watch and listen for

	Clean start	Troubled start
Generator	Works hard, then	settles
The pump	Runs, water back	Hums, no water
Sound	Smooth	Strain / stall
Means	All good	Fix it now

Straining or no water? Sort it out on the easy day.

Test Every Layer

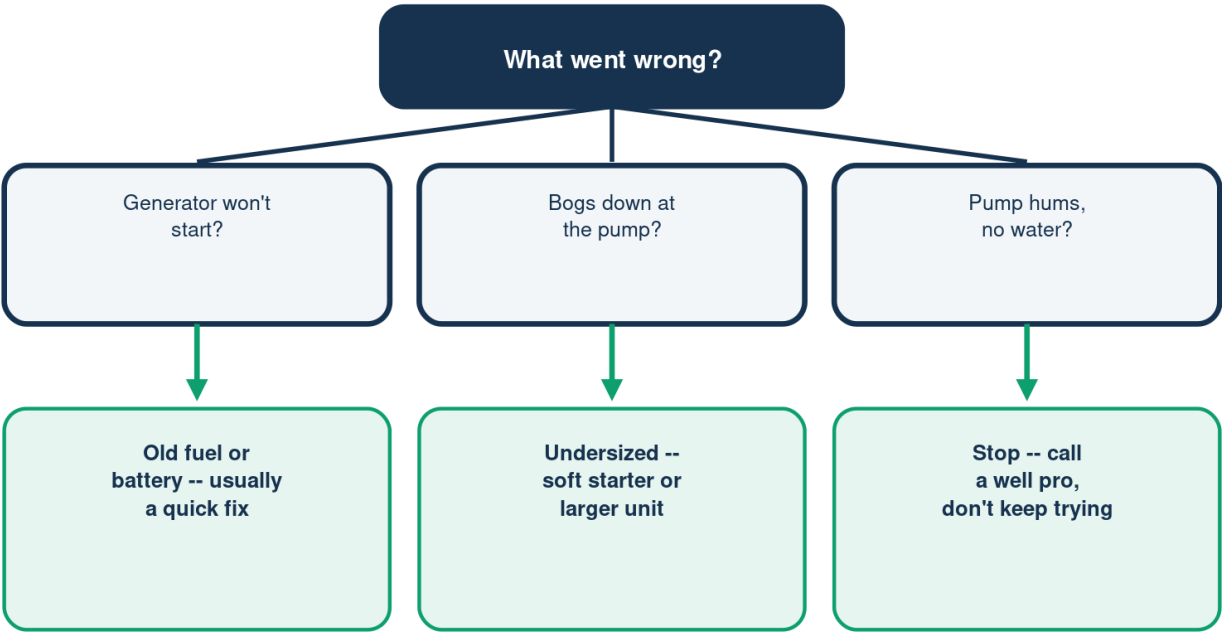
Not just the generator

	Layer	Check
Stored water	Amount	and freshness
The pump	Clean start,	good pressure
Septic pump	Runs on	the generator
Alarms + kit	CO alarms,	flashlights, cord

A plan is only as strong as its weakest layer.

Something Didn't Work -- Now What?

A failed test is a gift



Every problem is easier to fix on a calm day than in a storm.

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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