

Electrical safety while using generators



A portable generator can be a convenient method to maintain power to critical appliances if your electricity supply has been interrupted. However it can pose serious health and safety risks if installed or operated incorrectly.

Electrical hazards

- Don't use suicide leads. These leads are illegally made power leads that are used to connect generators to the wiring of your house. These dangerous leads have exposed parts at both ends which will cause electric shock to anyone touching them.
- Never attempt to modify or plug your generator directly into power points, any part of the electricity network, or operate your generator without a changeover switch. Failure to do so could result in electricity being generated and back fed through your service line into powerlines.
- Both suicide leads and modified plugs can feed power into the electricity network and have the potential to electrocute people in neighbouring properties, people in close proximity to fallen powerlines, or crews working to restore your normal electricity supply. It can also cause significant damage to your generator.
- Never attempt to install, operate or connect to a generator that is submerged in water, or while you are standing in water. This could result in electrocution or damage to appliances.
- Don't overload your generator. Every generator has a rated 'wattage' which limits the number of appliances it can safely power. Consider the total rating of all appliances that you wish to operate at the same time to determine if your generator can safely provide power to them.

Fire hazards

- Turn off your generator when refuelling, or when there are no operating appliances connected. Hot engine parts or exhaust could ignite the petrol.
- Never leave a running generator unattended in case of fire. Turn the generator off at night and when you're away from home.
- Avoid naked flames or ignition sources.

Carbon monoxide hazards

- Petrol or diesel powered generators produce deadly carbon monoxide fumes. Don't trust your senses to help you identify if carbon monoxide is entering your home or business.
- Always run your portable generator outdoors, and keep it well away from open windows - including those of your neighbours - so that exhaust fumes don't enter homes or businesses.

What should I do before connecting a generator to my premises?

- The only way to safely use a generator to power your house or office wiring is to use a changeover switch installed by a licensed electrical contractor. A changeover switch safely supplies power from a generator to the wiring installed in the premises. Don't turn on the changeover switch if your premises has been damaged.
- Only use a generator that complies with AS2970. The Australian Standard mark will appear on your generator or its packaging.

- Ensure you read the manufacturer's instructions carefully before using a generator.
- Remember to take into account that appliances with motors will use three to four times the running rating during the start-up process.

What should I do when operating my generator with extension leads and power boards?

- Ensure all leads and power boards are in good working order e.g. no damage to plug tops or exposed wiring.
- Always use a heavy-duty extension cord rated for outdoor use.
- Consider where leads and power boards are to be placed and keep away from wet areas.
- Ensure all appliances are turned off before connecting them to your generator.
- Once your appliances are connected to your generator, turn them on one by one to avoid overloading the generator.
- Appliances can be plugged directly into the generator power outlet, but always read the manufacturer's instructions carefully.

What else do I need to know?

- Make sure your generator is in good condition before storm season arrives.
- When storm season is over, empty the fuel from your generator, and properly store it so that it will be ready to go next season when you need it.

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