

Generator buying tips

Tips for Purchasing a Standby Generator *by Barry Hooper*

So you've decided that you don't want to be left in the dark if a hurricane or a tornado or other disaster hits your area. You've decided to buy a **standby generator**. Sounds simple enough. But when you get to the store, you find a bewildering variety of generators, from a small 5.5 kilowatt model for around \$2,000 to a 45 kilowatt monster for \$25,000 or more. How do you determine which one is right for you?

Of course, your budget will be a factor, but there are other factors that are equally important.

The first factor is whether you want a portable or stationary generator. If you want a stationary one, where will you put it? A generator's exhaust gas includes poisonous carbon monoxide, so it must be located outside, in a well ventilated area with plenty of space around it, and protected from the rain. If you want a portable one, where will you store it? You'll need a dry, easily accessible place, and you'll want to be sure to have a wheel kit for it.

The next factor is the maximum amount of electricity you'll need at any given time. Do you need your air conditioning on 24 hours a day? How about your refrigerator and that big freezer? Do you expect to keep everything plugged in as usual, or can you get by with a bare minimum, only plugging in each appliance for a short time as needed?

It's easy to find a chart that tells you how many watts each appliance draws when it's running as well as the additional wattage it draws when it's starting up. From that you should be able to figure out what size **standby generator** you'll need. If it's not big enough to handle your maximum load, you can burn out your appliances. But if you get one that's too big, you can actually harm the generator by not putting a big enough load on it.

In determining the amount of wattage you'll need, you should consider not only the Running Wattage of the **generator**, but also the Starting Wattage, especially if you're considering one of the smaller generators and plugging in appliances only as needed. The trick is to stagger the starting or plugging in of appliances. Don't start multiple items at the same time because the Starting Wattage is cumulative for each appliance that starts at the same time.

Another huge consideration is the type and amount of fuel the generator uses. Most of the smaller generators run on gasoline, while the larger units use liquid propane, natural gas or diesel. Remember, fuel is one of the first things that becomes scarce after a major event such as a hurricane. Fuel will very likely be rationed, so you'll have a hard enough time finding gas for your car, let alone your generator. Therefore, you'll need to store enough fuel to run the generator for at least several days, maybe more.

