



Maintaining your whole-house generator

When unpredictable weather events combine with an aging national power infrastructure, homeowners are more vulnerable to outages. That's why a whole-house generator can be a valuable investment.¹

Whole-house generators can stand in when your regular source of power fails. Unlike a standby portable generator, which can provide only enough power for essential circuits, a whole-house generator keeps your home fully functional or close to it if your power goes out. These types of generators can run on either natural gas, liquid propane, gasoline or diesel fuel.²

Having a whole-house generator installed provides peace of mind. But it's not a set-it-and-forget-it machine. It's important to keep in mind that you can't neglect your generator and expect it to fire up when you need it most. Creating a maintenance plan for your whole-house generator can keep you from being left in the dark and the cold if you experience a power outage.

Creating your maintenance plan

The best place to start creating a maintenance plan is to read the owner's manual that came with the generator. This lets you know the intervals at which the manufacturer recommends performing specific maintenance tasks.

If you no longer have the manual, you can also look on the manufacturer's website for this information. If all else fails, contact the manufacturer and find out whether there are any specific maintenance requirements for your particular generator.

If it's been a year or more since you bought the generator and you haven't done any maintenance on it, have a professional technician come out and do a tuneup. Ideally, they should inspect these primary systems:

- Engine filter
- Battery, alternator and transfer switch
- Fuel
- Cooling
- Lubrication
- Combustion³

Having a professional check these systems and their components keeps the machine in better working condition, so make a thorough inspection part of an annual maintenance habit. Schedule it at the same time every year, such as when daylight saving time ends, so it's easier to remember. Then, create a maintenance calendar to remind you to do the following⁴:

Monthly

- Check the oil level. Always be sure that the unit is completely shut down when you're checking the oil.
- Switch on your generator and let it run for 10 to 15 minutes without producing electrical power. This clears the fuel lines and keeps the motor's parts properly lubricated. If you have a newer model, this may happen automatically; check the manual to make sure. The manufacturer may recommend you do this every two months rather than monthly.⁵

Annually

- Change the air filter. If you aren't sure where the filter is located or how to change it, ask the technician who services your unit. They can show you how to change it the first time to make sure that you're familiar with the process. Never use a filter that hasn't been approved by your generator's manufacturer.
- Change the oil and oil filter. This is typically an annual task, but your generator's manufacturer may have a different recommendation. In some cases, the company may advise doing this task every two years or after a certain number of hours of use. Again, review your owner's manual.

In addition to doing these maintenance tasks on a regular schedule, it also helps to maintain the area around your generator. If you live in an area prone to flooding, it is important to have the unit elevated when installed. After installation, keep the unit from accumulating dirt by using a soft brush or cloth for cleaning. Perform regular visual inspections to make sure there are no visible leaks and no rodents or other small animals nesting around it. Keep the area around your generator clear of leaves and grass to make sure they aren't blocking the vents.

With proper maintenance, your whole-house generator should be ready for any power outage. Investing time in upkeep is well worth it. Put these tasks on your calendar now so you're sure to take care of them well in advance of any power loss at your home.

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¹ "Rising Power Outage Cost and Frequency Is Driving Grid Modernization Investment," Michael Hartnack, navigantresearch.com/news-and-views/rising-power-outage-cost-and-frequency-is-driving-grid-modernization-investment (June 28, 2018).

² "How Long Can You Run Whole House Generators?" assurancepower.com/aps-blog/entry/how-long-can-you-run-whole-house-generators-1 (Feb. 27, 2018).

³ "Generator Repair Costs," homeadvisor.com/cost/electrical/repair-a-generator/#maintenance (accessed Sept. 15, 2020).

⁴ cmcelectrical.com/blog/2019/january/4-tips-for-maintaining-your-home-generator.

⁵ "10 Quick Tips for Generator Maintenance," mcsmag.com/10-quick-tips-generator-maintenance (accessed Sept. 15, 2020).