Generator Power, Who Needs It?

Power is something we don't even think about it until the lights don't come on. We have all experienced not having electricity. Some times for just a few minutes and other times hours, days and even in severe disaster situations weeks. The question is what is your level of survival, your security, your peace of mind? Every one can deal with out power for a short period of an hour or two, maybe three or four. Then we start to wonder when will the power be back on? Today? Tomorrow? Let's face it, we live in America, if there is power to be had, we want it and we want it NOW! We are talking about generators here. So let's be smart about it, let's be prepared, be safe and choose where our comfort level is. Let's choose what system works well for me.

There are two types of generators; standby and portable. The standby generator is permanently installed, typically with an automatic transfer switch. The portable style generators are just that, portable, they are kept in storage until needed.

Pros and Cons of Each

Standby Pros

Once installed works automatically
Can operate larger appliances: A/C water heater, stove, as well as lights
Increased value of home
Use LP or natural gas
Runs minimum five days without refueling
Self monitoring weekly

Standby Cons

Once installed can not be moved
Needs onsite maintenance (like a car)
Installation costs are higher

Portable Pros

Can be stored and used when needed
Extremely practical for basic needs
Extension cords for direct appliance
Larger cords for manual transfer switch

Portable Cons

Requires maximum user interaction
Set up and removal at each power outage
Storage of gas and need of gas
Refueling three to four times daily
Can not operate during rain storms
Still need flash lights, candles and ice

Generator Safety

Let's plan to be safe. Make a plan where your generator needs to be located as per manufacture specs, state, and local codes. Some generators need to be ten feet from the home and/or flammable/combustible material like wood, screening, and yes, palm trees. By keeping the generator away from the house it helps to eliminate (co) poisoning from engine exhaust. You also need to use the proper size extension cords and have the proper size generator to operate desired appliances, lighting fans, etc. The safest way to use a

portable or standby generator is by using a transfer switch which is required when connecting the power directly to the home. A transfer switch prevents back feeding into utility lines which is dangerous and illegal, with a planned transfer switch you can prevent your generator from overloading and having your equipment operate efficiently as intended.

Final Note

Decide what you want and need then let an electrical contractor help you decide what system is right for you. All generators should be used and installed according to manufacture specs, national electrical code, all local codes, building codes and in accordance with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and environmental protection. When installing transfer switches, manual or automatic or standby type generators permitting and inspections are required. When you are not sure consult a licensed electrical contractor or your local building department.