

Use Generators Safely

Our lineworkers' lives are on the line



MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER AND CEO JERRY D. WILLIAMS

NO SEASON IN TEXAS IS SAFE FROM SEVERE weather. And when one of those destructive storms rolls through our area, lines can go down and members can lose power—sometimes for an extended period. As I write this we are still getting calls from members that after 4 days are finally able to receive power after two tornados hit North Lamar County earlier this week.

During an outage, some folks rely on portable generators while power is being restored. If you use a generator, do you know enough about it to operate it safely?

The safety of our members and our employees is a top priority at Lamar Electric Cooperative, especially during dangerous times. When storms hit our area, we rush to restore power as soon as conditions allow. Our line crews take necessary precautions before they work on downed power lines, taking care to ensure that a line is de-energized before working on it. But even after these measures, an improperly connected generator can put our workers' lives at risk.

We still see instances where a member pulls their meter and hooks up a generator to their breaker box or even to an outside outlet. Yes, you should never cut the meter seal and pull the meter, but the biggest problem is the hazard created when you do so. When the power comes back on the line side of the meter, lugs are now energized and exposed. In addition, some homes are metered differently and pulling the meter does not stop the power.

Lamar Electric is proud of our outstanding safety record, but sometimes—no matter how many steps we take to keep everyone safe, the very people we are there to help unknowingly put our lives—and their own—in danger.

Portable generators can prove fatal to linemen when used improperly. A generator connected to a home's wiring or plugged into a regular household outlet can cause back feed along power lines and electrocute anyone who comes into contact with them—even if the lines seem dead. Most folks do not realize the transformer serving their home will work as well backward as it does forward. Put 14,400 volts in and you get 120 volts out. Put 120 volts into the wires going to your house and you have energized the wires on the other side of the transformer at 14,400 volts.

Lamar Electric employees are not the only ones in danger when a portable generator is used improperly. Those who operate generators improperly risk being electrocuted, starting fires, damaging property or being poisoned by carbon monoxide.

I am reminded of a fellow that hooked up his generator on the carport (first problem-too close to windows and doors for carbon

monoxide). He cut one end off an extension cord and added a male end, so there would be two male ends. He plugged the cord into his generator and into an outlet on the carport (second problem-those outlets are rated for only 15 amps). With only a few lights now on, he happily went to pick up fallen limbs in the yard. That is where his body was found. The high voltage power lines were down in his yard and he had energized them at 14,400 volts.

Imagine a fire started inside the wall when the wires leading to an outlet on the patio or carport get over loaded. With the smoke confined inside the wall, it's hard to know the melted insulation is on fire until it is too late. When the flames get to the top of the wall, into the attic, there is a good chance the house is a goner.

Portable generators can be very helpful during outages. **But it is imperative that you follow these safety guidelines when using one:**

- ▶ Never connect a generator directly to your home's wiring unless your home has a transfer switch installed by a qualified electrical contractor. The transfer switch can be used to disconnect your home from the power grid. Connecting the generator to a house's wiring without such a switch can cause current to flow out of your home's circuitry and along power lines, putting at risk anyone who comes into contact with the lines.
- ▶ Always plug appliances directly into generators using heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cords. Make sure extension cords are free of cuts or tears and the plug has three prongs. Overloaded cords can cause fires or equipment damage.
- ▶ Ensure your generator is properly grounded.
- ▶ Never overload a generator. A portable generator should only be used when necessary to power essential equipment or appliances.
- ▶ Turn off all equipment powered by the generator before shutting it down.
- ▶ Only operate a generator on a dry, covered surface outdoors, away from windows and doors. A nearby window that is partially open for an extension cord will allow carbon monoxide to enter the house.
- ▶ Always have a fully charged fire extinguisher nearby.
- ▶ Never fuel a generator while it is operating.
- ▶ Read and adhere to the manufacturer's instructions for safe operation. Never cut corners when it comes to safety.

We encourage you to protect the well-being and safety of your family during outages and safeguard those who come to your aid during emergency situations. When we work together for safety and the good of our communities, we all benefit.



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5 Common Culprits of Electrical Fires

THERE ARE ABOUT 24,000 ELECTRICAL FIRES PER YEAR IN THE U.S., ACCORDING TO THE U.S. Fire Administration. Although most electrical fires start in the bedroom, the most fatal fires start in the living room, family room and den. Check the following areas of your home to ensure your home's electrical safety is up to par.

Electrical outlets: Faulty electrical outlets are a leading cause of home fires. As outlets age, so do the wires behind them that you can't see. Any loose, damaged or warm-to-the-touch outlets should be repaired or replaced.

Electrical wiring: Outdated wiring is another common cause of electrical fires. Frequently tripped breakers, flickering lights and burning smells are clear warning signs. If your home is more than 20 years old, it may not be able to handle today's increased power load. If you suspect your home's wiring is outdated, leave this one to the pros and contact a qualified electrician.

Overloaded cords and outlets: Extension cords are not permanent solutions. If your big-screen TV, home theater system and other electronics are plugged into extension cords, it's time to call an electrician and install additional outlets.

Old appliances: Older appliances are more likely to have loose or damaged wiring, which means they're more likely to catch fire. Check older appliances for damage and determine if it's time to upgrade or replace. Also check to ensure you're using appliance-grade outlets. A qualified electrician can help with installation.

Light fixtures: Light fixtures, lamps and lightbulbs are other common culprits behind electrical fires. Installing a bulb with a wattage too high for a lamp or light fixture is a leading cause of electrical fires. Always check the maximum recommended bulb wattage on any lighting fixture or lamp and never go over the recommendation. Keep flammable materials like cloth and paper away from light fixtures. The material can heat up and ignite, causing a fire. Faulty lamps and light fixtures also can cause fires.



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June Is National Safety Month

WHILE LAMAR ELECTRIC OFTEN FOCUSES ON ELECTRICAL SAFETY, THERE ARE MANY other dangers lurking out there. In recognition of National Safety Month, we're sharing the National Safety Council's list of the top causes of preventable injuries and death away from the workplace.

1. Poisoning. In 2011, poisonings overtook car crashes for the first time as the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death for all ages combined. Poisoning deaths are caused by gases, chemicals and other substances, but prescription drug overdose is by far the leading cause.

2. Vehicle crashes. Crashes are the second-leading cause of unintentional injury-related death overall. Impaired driving, distracted driving, speeding and inexperience can cause a life to be cut short in the blink of an eye.

3. Falls. Falling is the third-leading cause of unintentional injury-related death over all age groups, but it's the No. 1 cause of death for those 65 and older.

4. Choking and suffocation. Choking on food or other objects is a primary cause. Suffocation and choking rank higher among the elderly and infants.

5. Drowning. It's the No. 1 cause of death for children ages 1-4, mostly due to children falling into pools or being left alone in bathtubs.

6. Fires and burns. Fires often start at night, when families are asleep and most vulnerable. A working smoke alarm will cut in half the chances of dying in a fire.

7. Natural and environmental incidents. Weather-related disasters claim hundreds of lives per year. You should learn all you can about emergency preparedness and always have an emergency kit on hand.



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Freshen Up Your Fridge

IF YOU'VE GOT LEFTOVERS FROM LAST month lurking in your refrigerator, it's time to pull on your latex kitchen gloves and clean it out. You may find out you have more room than you thought—enough to unplug the extra refrigerator or freezer that might be eating up electricity in the garage.

Try these tips to clean out and organize your fridge.

Do a total fridge cleanup. Arm yourself with large trash bags, and throw away old leftovers. Make sure to check the expiration dates on rarely used condiments and dressings and toss any that are past their prime.

If certain foods that you store in the fridge spoil before you eat them, vow to freeze them in the future.

Adjust the height of each shelf so food is easier to see and reach. This could free up space. Designate spaces for fruits, vegetables, meats and drinks—so nothing is “out of sight, out of mind” and left to rot.

Store leftovers in transparent containers and label them with the date the food was prepared so no one accidentally eats spoiled food.

Cool hot foods before you put them in the refrigerator to save energy.

Vacuum the refrigerator coils monthly. Dust trapped underneath and behind the unit forces the fridge to work harder and use more energy.

JUNE HOLIDAYS

Flag Day
Sunday, June 14

Juneteenth
Friday, June 19

Father's Day
Sunday, June 21

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The Little Blue Logo That Changed Buying Habits

THE LITTLE BLUE (AND SOMETIMES BLACK)

logo with the star inside that you see on all sorts of appliances and electronics has changed the way Americans shop.

The Energy Star program claims credit for reducing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and for saving Americans \$30 billion in energy costs. Analysts credit Energy Star with pushing manufacturers to innovate, helping them to set energy efficiency goals and upping competition in the market.

What Energy Star does is make it easy to know whether a product you're thinking about buying is energy efficient. Essentially, the program looks at the average energy use of each type of product and awards the Energy Star rating to top performers based on varying criteria.

A refrigerator needs to be 9% more energy efficient than the minimum efficiency standard; a computer needs to use 25% less electricity than conventional models and include a power-saving mode for when it's not being used. Energy Star standards require that TVs must use 3 watts or less when switched off; lightbulbs must use two-thirds less energy than standard incandescent bulbs; and home furnaces must be 4%–15% more efficient than standard furnaces.

So if the appliance or electronic device you're purchasing includes the Energy Star logo, you know it's among the most energy-efficient products available. That simplicity is the secret to the success of the program that is run by the U.S. Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The program's effectiveness comes from a complex process of making sure the Energy Star logo is accurate and trusted—and the numbers show it is trusted. Americans bought more than 300 million Energy Star-rated products in 2018, and a study found that three-fourths of U.S. households say the Energy Star label influences their purchases. According to energystar.gov, EPA uses the following specifications to determine if products meet the Energy Star standard:

- ▶ Product categories must contribute significant energy savings nationwide.
- ▶ Certified products must deliver the features and performance demanded by consumers, in addition to increased energy efficiency.
- ▶ If the certified product costs more than a conventional, less efficient counterpart, purchasers will recover their investment in increased energy efficiency through utility bill savings within a reasonable period of time.



▶ Energy efficiency can be achieved through broadly available, nonproprietary technologies offered by more than one manufacturer.

▶ Product energy consumption and performance can be measured and verified with testing.

▶ Labeling effectively differentiates products and must be visible to consumers.

Today, more than 500 certified labs in 25 countries around the world test more than 1,500 products a year, along with surprise inspections, to manage a list of 60,000 product models.

Energy Star requires quality standards in addition to just energy efficiency. In general, products must have popular features, such as internet connectivity for smart TVs. Lightbulbs must last up to 15 times longer and produce 70%–90% less heat than conventional bulbs.

In 2018, Energy Star tested 1,792 models, disqualifying 59 of them. Of the 858 kinds of lighting and fans tested that year, 51 were disqualified. Of the 35 TVs tested, two were disqualified.

Energy Star has caught on because it has something for everybody—ways for consumers to save money; ways for businesses to promote their efficient products; online calculators for those wanting deep dives into finding the ideal energy use; and a simple little logo that tells us we're buying one of the most energy-efficient products available.