

# HURRICANE SEASON: Getting a Gas Generator

*Hate the thought of being in the dark after a storm? Generators have become more affordable and practical. Here are some great tips for the “season.”*

## Trap

Vincent is a New York native who moved to Palm Beach County in 2004 to start a new job. He vividly remembers the hurricane seasons of 2005 and 2006 because he had never experienced a hurricane before and decided to ride out the storms with friends in his apartment. It was not as much fun as he anticipated, particularly when the power went off, and the ice in his cooler melted. He now owns a home and wants to be better prepared. Vincent went online and got hurricane preparation information from Palm Beach County’s Emergency Operations Center. He learned how to make a hurricane plan, create a home safety check list and stock his emergency supply kit.

It’s been years since Palm Beach County sustained a direct hit by a hurricane and the odds are this year could be the year to break that trend. Vincent decided to look into purchasing a portable, standby, gas generator. Over the years, he watched the prices of generators go down and felt the time was right to buy one. He went to a home improvement store that advertized a brand he recognized and was overwhelmed by the choices. The salesman asked him a lot of questions he didn’t have answers to. Vincent quickly realized he needed to get more information before making a purchase he might regret.

## Tips

Consider these guidelines to help make the right decisions concerning a generator:

- Not many years ago, considering the purchase of a standby generator would only have been a choice for the rich. As with most commodities over time, generators have become affordable even for the most cost-conscious consumer. A recent survey by the Consumer Affairs Division revealed decreases from 10 to 23 percent for the price of generators.
- Small, efficient, residential gas-powered generators can be purchased for \$500 to \$2,500. They are capable of supplying power to essential appliances in the home for a short period of time but are not meant for long-term use. They are relatively easy to operate, convenient and make life a lot easier when you’re waiting for Florida Power & Light to work on your block.

- Deciding which generator is right for you involves many factors. If you're not sure what a watt is or what the difference between a volt and an amp is, you should probably ask a dealer or professional electrician for advice.
- A local home improvement store can be a good place to start your search for a generator. Make a note of the manufacturers' names and the model numbers. There are many types to choose from, so it can be confusing. Check Web sites for the manufacturers and gather more information. Is the generator you want only available with an electric start? Is the engine quiet and fuel efficient? How long is the warranty? Can it be serviced locally?
- Determine what essential appliances will be used in the home during the power outage (i.e. washer, water heater, refrigerator, television or small air-conditioner). You will need to know the startup and running wattage of each appliance to make sure enough power will be generated. You can use a load meter to determine the exact wattage used by each appliance.
- Once you have purchased a generator, select an outdoor, well ventilated location to set it up. Protect it from the rain by placing it in a carport, away from air intakes to the home, or use a canopy. Make sure the generator is on level ground. Review the owner's manual thoroughly for safe operation. Once you've found the best location, start it up and give it a test run so you know what to expect when the power goes out. Also, consider a way to chain the generator to your house to keep it from being stolen.
- Think about being self sufficient for at least two days after the storm, and determine the amount of gasoline you will need. The average consumption rate for a generator is approximately 0.67 gallons/hour. This means you will need approximately 32 gallons for 48 hours. Some residents only run the generator a few hours a day to save gasoline.
- Store gasoline in proper containers and in a ventilated area away from natural gas water heaters. Vapors can escape from containers and travel to a pilot light and possibly ignite.
- Using a generator safely should be your primary concern. Carbon monoxide poisoning and electrocution are the two biggest risk factors. Never plug the generator into a wall outlet. Use a heavy duty, outdoor-rated extension cord with a wire gage appropriate for your generator.
- Check the oil daily or after every eight hours of use. Never refuel while the engine is running. Shut it off, and let it cool down for two minutes or more first. Keep the gas fresh, and consider using a stabilizer if the generator is unused for 30 days or longer.

For more information, call Palm Beach County Consumer Affairs at  
561-712-6600 (Boca/Delray 888-852-7362 toll free)

[www.pbcgov/consumer](http://www.pbcgov/consumer)