

# Be Prepared: Generator Safety

By Ron Schultz

It is that time of year when the weather starts changing. We all should be thinking about having a plan and an outage kit available in the event of a power outage.

Klickitat PUD works hard to keep outages to a minimum and restore power quickly. However, widespread outages resulting from severe storms may prevent power restoration from being done without unforeseen delays.

Many customers have portable generators or fixed generators at their homes and businesses to use in the event of a power outage or emergency. Using and installing a generator correctly and safely protects not only you, but also the PUD's line crews.

A generator without a properly installed transfer switch can back-feed along the power line and electrocute or injure anyone coming into contact with it, including our line workers who might be making repairs.

Klickitat PUD's distribution lines carry voltages of 12,470 volts between phases, and 7,200 volts if measured to ground. When a generator connected to the supply voltage source is unintentionally connected to the PUD system, the same transformer that steps down the voltage to your home or business steps the voltage up to the PUD delivery voltage. This would create a dangerous—and possibly deadly—situation should someone contact that line.

Klickitat PUD recommends that you have any generator transfer switch installation done by a licensed and bonded electrical contractor. The installation must be inspected and approved by the state electrical inspector.

Other tips to remember:

- Make sure extension cords connected to the generator are in good



Portable generators come in handy during power outages, but come with their own risks. Use a generator safely and correctly to protect both yourself and KPUD's line crews.

condition and are rated for the load they are intended to carry. The cord should have a grounding plug.

- Connect only essential equipment and appliances to the generator, and prevent overloading it.
- Only use the generator in a well-ventilated environment, as high carbon-monoxide levels can be produced quickly and can be deadly.
- Use a ground-fault circuit interrupter to prevent electrical shocks and electrocution.
- Keep children away from the generator at all times.
- Store fuel safely away from the generator, living areas and any sources of combustion. Make sure the fuel is in properly labeled containers that are suitable for the type of fuel contained.
- Before refueling the generator, always make sure it is turned off and cooled down.

- Have a fully charged fire extinguisher near the generator. Make sure the extinguisher is properly rated to extinguish any fuel sources that could ignite.

## Did You Know?

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, 600 carbon-monoxide poisoning deaths associated with portable generators were reported from 1999 to 2010. Recently, the average deaths per year increased to 81.

About 40 percent of all portable generator-related deaths occurred during the winter when homeowners often use them during weather-related outages.

Almost 70 percent of deaths related to portable power generators occur at home, often with the generator operating in the basement, crawl space, garage or enclosed carport of owners seeking convenience without considering safety. ■