Phillips County Emergency Management Newsletter

When the Lights Go Out, Make Sure Your Backup Plan Doesn't.

Generator preparedness checklist

Operate generators outdoors only, at least 20 feet from the house, with exhaust directed away from doors, windows, and vents.

Never run a generator in a garage, basement, shed, or other enclosed or partially enclosed space—even with doors open. Keep it away from snowdrifts and areas where exhaust could enter the home.

Test-run the generator according to the manufacturer's instructions. Check engine oil, fuel, air filter, spark plug, and battery if equipped. Inspect cords for damage and confirm they are rated for the intended outdoor use and electrical load. Review the owner's manual and know the starting and shutdown procedures.

Plan what you will power

Identify essential equipment: refrigerator, freezer, furnace controls, medical devices, and a few lights. Check starting watts as well as running watts; motors can require significantly more power when starting.

Use heavy-duty, outdoor-rated cords of the correct gauge and length. Install working carbon monoxide alarms on every level of the home and outside sleeping areas.

Troubleshooting: What if the generator won't work?

Problem: The generator won't start

Check the fuel level and confirm the fuel valve is open, if equipped. Verify the engine switch is ON and the choke is set correctly for a cold start. Check the oil level; a low-oil shutdown sensor may prevent starting. Check the battery charge on electric-start models. If fuel has been stored for a long time, stale fuel may be the problem.

Tip: Follow the starting sequence in your specific owner's manual. Don't keep cranking indefinitely.

Problem: The generator runs, but there's no power

Check the generator's circuit breakers and reset them according to the manual. Inspect extension cords and plugs for damage. Disconnect appliances and test the generator with a small, suitable load. Check whether the generator's output or overload indicator shows a fault.

Problem: The generator starts but shuts off

Check the oil level and any low-oil warning. Check the fuel supply and fuel valve. Check for an overloaded generator or a warning light/error code. Ensure snow, debris, or other obstructions are not blocking ventilation or cooling airflow.

Tip: Repeated shutdowns, unusual noises, fuel leaks, or overheating need professional attention. Never bypass a safety sensor.



Ice can sing. Expanding and contracting ice can produce loud booms, groans, and high-pitched zipping sounds. Temperature changes create stresses that send vibrations through the ice.



The sun can appear to have two extra suns beside it. These bright spots, called sun dogs, form when sunlight bends through ice crystals in the atmosphere. They often appear on either side of the sun and can look like glowing patches or miniature suns.



Yes, it can thunder during a snowstorm. It's called thundersnow. Lightning and thunder occur during snowfall, sometimes alongside intense snowfall rates. If you hear thunder during a snowstorm, the weather is doing considerably more than looking pretty

It can be "too cold to snow"—sort of. Extremely cold air usually holds less moisture, and the atmospheric conditions needed for snowfall may be absent. But it can still snow at temperatures well below 0°F.

Your winter vehicle emergency kit

Warm blankets or sleeping bags

Extra winter coat, gloves, hat, and socks

Flashlight and spare batteries

Phone charger and portable power bank

Bottled water and nonperishable snacks

Ice scraper and snow brush

Small shovel and traction material, such as sand or cat litter

Jumper cables or a jump starter

First-aid kit and necessary medications

Reflective warning devices and a bright-colored distress cloth

Basic tools and a properly inflated spare tire, if equipped

Winter Driving: What to Do If You Drive Into a Blizzard



If You Can't See the Road, Don't Pretend You Can.

The most important rule is this: If you can safely avoid driving into a blizzard, don't go. If conditions deteriorate while you're already on the road, prioritize getting out of traffic and reaching safety without making sudden or risky maneuvers.

If visibility suddenly disappears

Slow down gradually. Avoid slamming on the brakes or making sudden steering movements.

Increase following distance. Other drivers may stop or lose control unexpectedly.

Turn on your headlights. Use low beams in blowing snow; high beams can reflect off the snow and make visibility worse.

Do not use cruise control on snow- or ice-covered roads.

If you cannot see well enough to drive safely, get off the roadway if you can do so safely. Look for a nearby parking lot, designated rest area, or other safe shelter. Avoid stopping in a traffic lane or making a sudden move onto an unfamiliar shoulder.



If you become stranded in the snow

Stay with your vehicle in most circumstances. In a whiteout, walking to find help can leave you disoriented, exposed to extreme wind chill, and difficult for rescuers to locate.

Call 911 if you are in immediate danger or need emergency assistance. Give your location, direction of travel, nearest highway or mile marker, and vehicle description. Share GPS coordinates if available.

Turn on your hazard lights and make your vehicle as visible as possible.

Keep your exhaust pipe clear of snow. A blocked exhaust can allow deadly carbon monoxide to enter the vehicle.

Use the engine and heater sparingly. If it is safe to do so, run them periodically for warmth, following emergency guidance. Keep a window slightly open while the engine runs, and check the exhaust pipe frequently.

Conserve your phone battery. Send your location and situation to someone who can relay it to responders if needed.

Stay warm with blankets, extra clothing, and layers. Keep moving your hands and feet gently to maintain circulation.

BLIZZARD SAFETY: KNOW WHEN TO STOP

A familiar road can become dangerous in minutes when blowing snow reduces visibility. If you can avoid traveling during a winter storm, stay home. If conditions deteriorate while you're driving, slow down carefully and seek a safe place away from traffic. If you become stranded, stay with your vehicle, call for help, and keep your exhaust pipe clear of snow. Never assume walking for help is safer than remaining in your vehicle.

In rural areas, help may take time to reach you. Carry winter survival supplies, keep your phone charged, and let someone know your travel plans.