

[Polk's Top 7 Tips to a Long RV Generator Life](#)



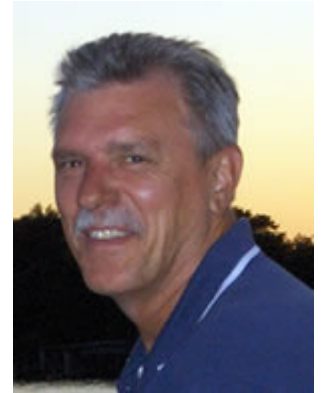
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My first tip won't extend the life of your motorhome's generator, but it could save someone's life.

1. Carbon monoxide poisoning:

Carbon monoxide gas is invisible, odorless and deadly. If for any reason your motorhome does not have a functioning CO gas detector, you need to purchase and install one designed for use in recreation vehicles (follow the manufacturer instructions for proper installation).



Test the CO detector for proper operation prior to each RV trip. Inspect the generator exhaust system before starting the generator, and never run the generator set with a damaged or leaking exhaust system. Do not leave windows open when running the generator and do not park close to obstacles such as buildings or other RVs when running the generator set. Be cautious of other RV owners running their generators close to where you are parked, and never sleep while the generator is running.

2. Preventive maintenance

The key to a long-lasting generator set is periodic maintenance. We are primarily concerned with two types of maintenance: preventive maintenance and routine maintenance. Both can add years of life to your generator set.

Preventive maintenance is maintenance you perform on your generator before a problem exists. These checks are designed to prevent or identify potential problems that could lead to mechanical breakdown, malfunction or failure of a component or system on your generator. Preventive maintenance consists of cleaning, inspecting, lubricating, adjusting and servicing your generator. Prior to starting your generator, you should, at a minimum, inspect the generator set for fuel or oil leaks; inspect the exhaust system for proper mounting and for leaks; and check the oil level. Also, make sure the CO detector(s) are operating properly and that all appliances are turned off.

3. Routine or scheduled maintenance

For generator sets, scheduled maintenance is performed in intervals based on hours of operation. Scheduled maintenance is designed to keep your generator set in top operating condition and prevent untimely breakdowns and repairs. It is essential that you read your generator owner's manual and warranty information in regards to who is responsible for what when it comes to routine and scheduled maintenance. Often, scheduled maintenance that is required and not performed can void your warranty, and shorten the life of your generator set.



Monitor the generator hour meter and have the required maintenance performed at specified intervals. Most generator owner manuals have periodic maintenance schedules listed and maintenance logs to record and keep track of all maintenance performed.

4. Exercise your generator

One important aspect to generator longevity that is often overlooked is putting the generator to work. What I mean by that is exercising the generator set on a regular basis. This exercise routine helps to solve several problems related to a generator that sits unused for periods of time.

For starters, fuel-related problems can occur in as little as one month of sitting idle. In addition to clearing out any stale fuel, this monthly exercise regime also re-lubricates all of the engine seals and helps to prevent carbon buildup.

Exercising your generator set also heats up the generator windings and eliminates moisture buildup. Exercising the generator not only contributes to a more reliable generator, but it extends the life of the engine as well.

So, what exactly do I mean when I say exercise your generator? I mean you should start and run the generator with at least a 50-percent load, for at least two hours every month. It is extremely important that you run it with this minimum-rated load.

Generators are designed to run with a load placed on them. Check your generator owner's manual for load ratings specific to your generator set. And remember, when exercising the generator it's always better to let it run for longer (two-hour) periods than it is for shorter periods of time.

5. Generator operating conditions

When using your generator, you need to consider current weather conditions. Make sure the engine oil viscosity is correct for ambient temperatures. For carbureted gasoline generators, make sure the altitude setting is adjusted properly. Always remember to readjust altitude settings when you return to lower altitudes. In dusty conditions it will be necessary to perform air cleaner maintenance and change the oil more frequently.

Being aware of the operating conditions and performing the required maintenance accordingly will help extend the life of your generator set.

6. Storing your generator

For gasoline generators, fill the fuel tank on the motorhome and add a fuel stabilizer like Sta-Bil. Run the engine and the generator (with ½-rated load) long enough for the fuel stabilizer to get through the entire fuel system. Most fuel stabilizers will protect the fuel system and components for six months or longer. Follow the fuel stabilizer instructions.

Change the oil and oil filter on the generator engine prior to storage. Acids accumulate in used oil and can corrode engine bearings, especially while sitting for long periods of time. If you don't plan to start the motorhome or generator, during storage, make sure the battery(s) is fully charged and disconnect the battery cables (negative cable first).

If you do plan to start the motorhome and/or generator while in storage, periodically check the water level in the battery cells and keep the battery(s) clean and fully charged.

7. Follow guidelines for your generator type

There are gasoline, diesel and LP-gas generators. To add years of reliable service to the generator set, follow the recommended maintenance intervals and operating and storing procedures. In addition, follow all cautions and warnings found in your generator owner's manual.

Always keep in mind that when operating any generator there is the threat of carbon monoxide poisoning. Make sure everybody understands how to recognize symptoms of CO poisoning and what to do if exposed to it.

CO symptoms include: dizziness, vomiting, nausea, muscular twitching, intense headache, throbbing in the temples, weakness and sleepiness, and inability to think coherently.

If you or anyone else experiences any of these symptoms, get to fresh air immediately. If the symptoms persist seek medical attention. Shut the vehicle or generator down and do not operate it until it has been inspected and repaired by a professional.

RV expert Mark Polk owns [RV Education 101](#), a North Carolina-based company that produces and sells educational videos, DVDs and E-books on how to use RVs. Mark has more than 30 years of experience in RV maintenance. He retired from the U.S. Army in 1996 as a Chief Warrant Officer Three, specializing in wheeled and track vehicle fleet maintenance operations. He and his wife, Dawn, started RV Education 101 in 1999. They travel with their two boys in a 35-foot Type A motorhome. [Watch Polk's technical videos.](#)

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