



RESIDENTIAL GENERATOR SYSTEMS

GENERAL INFORMATION & PERMITTING PROCESS

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Purpose

This handout contains the permit process and submittal requirements for residential standby and portable generators in Sausalito. Various permits are required to be issued prior to the installation of a generator and may be required prior to the use of a generator. Regardless of a requirement for a permit, all generators must comply with safety, noise and setback standards.

- The Planning Department reviews location, noise, and impervious surface and issues a Zoning Permit.
- The Building Department reviews electrical and plumbing specifications and issues a Building Permit.
- The Fire Department reviews fuel type, location, and shutoff systems during Building permit review.
- The Department of Public Works reviews and permits projects that encroach into the public right of way.

Portable vs. Standby (Fixed) Generators

You may choose to utilize a portable generator or install a standby (fixed) generator. **Portable generators** can suffice to keep one or more household appliances running depending on their designed output and operate using manually loaded gas, diesel, or propane. **Standby generators** are permanently connected to the home's natural gas meter and electrical panel to generate and provide electricity to the home's circuits. Both systems produce noise and exhaust. Standby generators and portable generators that are connected directly to the structure's electrical system through a transfer switch require Building and Zoning Permits.

A portable generator system that operates with extension cords (not permanently attached to a structure or connected to the structure's electrical system) does not require permits, however the following are required:

- Exhaust must be oriented away from home windows and doors as well as those of neighboring homes.
- Extension cords may not cross a public right of way and should not cross property lines.
- All generators are subject to the City's noise limits. Noise levels cannot exceed City noise limits at or beyond any property line, or noise attenuation must be provided.
- Never operate your generator near dry vegetation or while you aren't able to properly monitor it.
- Fuel storage is limited to 10 gallons maximum and must comply with manufacture filling guidelines.

Permitting Process

- Download, fill out and sign a [Building Permit Application](#)
- Download, fill out and sign a [Zoning Permit Application](#)
- Note: If the subject property is on the [Noteworthy Structures List](#), please check with a Planner to see if a Certificate of Appropriateness is required.
- Digitally submit the following at the [Virtual Service Counter](#):
 - Building Permit and Zoning Permit application
 - Complete set of plans and required documents

The Virtual Service Counter is open to all those inquiring about permitting for standby generator systems Monday/Wednesday and submittals on Tuesday/Thursday. [You must register in advance online.](#)

- Pay the [fees](#) which are due at time of permit submittal by credit card:
 - Building Permit: Receive fee estimate from Permit Technician during a Virtual Service Counter appointment; includes Building Permit Fee, MEP fee, plan check fee and miscellaneous fees)
 - Intermediate Zoning Permit - \$300
 - Southern Marin Fire District Review - minimum \$83 (additional inspection fees may apply)
 - Department of Public Works – variable for trenching in the right of way
 - Historical Resource Review – variable

Building and Planning Submittal Requirements

- Completed **Building Permit** Application
- Completed **Zoning Permit** Application (most battery backup systems exempt from completing the Zoning Data Sheet)
- Site Plan** of the property, drawn to scale, that indicates the proposed location of the generator and neighboring structures adjacent to the generator location and the following:
 - Dimensions of the generator and platform
 - Distance from generator to combustible construction and to operable doors or windows (minimum 5-foot distance must be shown on site plan)
 - Distance from generator to property lines and setbacks. Generator cannot be located inside setback areas
 - Location of buildings on adjacent properties including windows and doors and usage of intervening spaces (patios, decks, etc.)
 - Location of trench for gas line (if applicable); any trenching in the public right of way will require an Encroachment Permit from the Department of Public Works
 - Location of trench for electrical conduit (if applicable)
 - Location of the first responders disconnect for the system, demonstrating that the system can be disconnected at the gas meter and electrical panel
 - Location of any existing utilities underground or overhead, and easements for utilities
 - A statement on the plans indicating the zoning district, that the generator meets the noise standards for that district during normal operations and/or generator will only be used during a prolonged power outage or emergency and meets the noise standard of 75 dba at the property line, and that testing of emergency generators shall be limited to the hours between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on any day, and shall be limited in duration to that specified by manufactures specifications
- Product specification** (Manufacturer, model number, fuel type, noise specifications, etc.)
- Manufacturer's Specifications and Installation Instructions** for Generator and Transfer Switch – include noise specifications and information on how the generator meets the noise standards
- Electrical single-line diagram** including conduit and wire size, indicate transfer switch location if used.
- Gas-line schematic** showing size and type of piping BTU requirements of generator, location of gas shut-off valve

Southern Marin Fire Department Requirements

The following items are guidelines for fire and life safety requirements for installed emergency generators.

- Stationary emergency and standby power generators should be listed in accordance with UL2200 (2019 CFC 1203.1.1).
- Generators shall be installed on a concrete pad, on grade, and powered by a gas line source.
- The generator shall be able to be shut off at the main gas line for the structure.
- The main electrical panel shall provide signage that the building is powered by an alternate energy source and locations of emergency shutoff valves.
- Generators shall comply with NFPA 37 Standards.

Setback Requirements

Generators shall comply with setback standards of the underlying zoning and be placed in an area that is least disruptive to neighbors (and is reasonably practical for the property owner)

ZONE	FRONT	SIDE	REAR
R1-6, R1-8, R2-2.5, R2-5, R-3, PR	0 feet	5 feet	15 feet
R1-20	0 feet	10 feet	20 feet
H, W	0 feet	One-half of building height but no less than 5 feet	15 feet
A	0 feet	0 feet	0 feet
CC, CR, CN	0 feet	10 feet	15 feet
SC, CW	0 feet	One-half of building height but no less than 5 feet	20 feet
I-M and W-M	Consult with a Planner		

Noise Standards

Exterior noise, measured at the property line adjacent to the generator, shall not exceed the noise limit specified by SMC 12.16.040. If generator noise exceeds the noise limit at the property line normally allowed noise attenuation measures shall be incorporated to make the unit compliant. Per Ordinance Number 1279, during prolonged power outages (greater than 4 hours) or emergency these limits may be exceeded for the purpose of operating generators during the outage or emergency.

ZONE	TIME OF DAY	HOURS	DECIBEL LIMIT - NORMALLY	DECIBEL LIMIT – DURING PROLONGED POWER OUTAGE OR EMERGENCY
R1 and R2	Overnight	10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.	45	45*
	Evening	7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.	50	75
	Daytime	7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.	55	75
R3	Overnight	10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.	50	50*
	Daytime	7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.	55	75
CN, CR	Overnight	10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.	55	55*
CC, W, OA, and CW	Daytime	7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.	60	75
I	Anytime	Anytime	70	75

*Exceptions to the decibel limits during a power outage or emergency:

Health/Medical Needs: For those with a health or medical need, a reasonable accommodations request shall be approved by, and filed with, the City for use of the generator to exceed this noise standard up to 75 decibels at the property line during any power outage period or emergency.

Residential Uses: During a prolonged power outage period or emergency, generators for residential uses shall comply with setback standards of the underlying zoning district, are limited to 75 dB at the property line and be placed in an area that is reasonably practical for the homeowner that is least disruptive to neighbors. Generators supporting residential uses should be shut off when not critically needed in order to minimize the disturbance to neighbors and in particular, should not run during the hours of 10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m., except as required to manage food spoilage.

Commercial Uses: During a prolonged power outage period or emergency, generators for commercial uses may be operational 24 hours per day, are limited to 75 dB at the property line and should be shut off when not critically needed to minimize the disturbance of neighbors.

Additional Resources

- **Sound Attenuation Measures** – There are many options for mitigating sound, including increased distance from the receiver, earth berms/slopes, walls, and specifically-designed enclosures. You will need to verify with the generator manufacturer that your proposed sound attenuation measures are safe will not void the unit’s warranty.
- **Bay Area Air Quality Management District:** Separate permit required by Bay Area Air Quality Management District for combustion engines, 50 brake horsepower (bhp) and larger. For more information: <https://www.baaqmd.gov/permits/apply-for-a-permit/engine-permits>
- **PG&E Medical Baseline Program:** Extra notifications in advance of a Public Safety Power Shutoff and, potentially, a lower rate on your monthly energy bill: https://www.pge.com/en_US/residential/save-energy-money/help-paying-your-bill/longer-term-assistance/medical-condition-related/medical-baseline-allowance/medical-baseline-allowance.page
- **California Air Resources Control Board:** State regulations and information on emergency backup generators. <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/our-work/programs/emergency-backup-generators>

Property Information

Address:	Assessor’s Parcel Number:	
Property Owner Name:	Email:	Phone:
Applicant Name:	Email:	Phone:

Acknowledgment

I, _____, have read the above information and have submitted all the required forms, plans and documentation. I acknowledge, understand, and agree that all materials and information submitted to the City by, or on behalf of, the applicant in furtherance of this application submitted by the applicant will be treated by the City as public records pursuant to the CA Public Records Act which may be reviewed by any person and if requested, that a copy will be provided by the City to any person upon the payment of its direct costs of duplication. I further certify that the generator proposed:

- meets the noise standards for the zoning district it will be installed in during normal conditions and must be attenuated safely if it does not; or
- will only be used during a prolonged power outage or emergency and meets the noise standard of 75 dba at the property line

and that I understand that testing of emergency generators shall be limited to the hours between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on any day, and shall be limited in duration to that specified by manufactures specifications. I have read and agree to all of the above.

Signature	Date
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