



## Preparing for Power Loss in an Emergency

By Vince Scarcella, Risk Control Director, CNA

**W**eather events, wildfires, and power grid problems can leave your veterinary hospital or clinic without power. This can affect critical operations like diagnostics/lab procedures, surgeries, and life support systems, including heat, air conditioning, refrigeration, security systems, computers, and the internet.

Eleven years after Superstorm Sandy hit the East Coast, it still remains the largest Atlantic tropical cyclone on record. Sandy was not just large in size; it delivered a storm surge, strong winds, rain, and even mountain snow.<sup>1</sup>

During Superstorm Sandy, my family's New York State home and community lost power for several days. On the second day of the storm aftermath, our dog Patches was attacked by several dogs roaming the neighborhood. My son Matthew raced into the brawl attempting to break it up. Unfortunately, both my son and dog came out battered. The hours following involved two visits for medical intervention. Matthew was brought to the local hospital ER for stitches and Patches had a trip to the veterinary clinic for antibiotics and mending. With the storm disrupting daily routines and wreaking havoc in so many areas, quality medical care was available

for our personal needs because the local hospital and our veterinarian invested in emergency generators.

All businesses rely on multiple systems for normal day-to-day operations. There are many reasons to invest in an emergency generator. Depending on the services provided, you may experience the following when there is a loss of power:

- 1. Practice closure** Having your practice closed poses a reputational risk that can be hard to quantify.
- 2. Loss of air conditioning and dehumidification** Loss of these functions can mean mold growth, contaminated operating theaters, and extreme discomfort for any patients sheltered at your location. Additionally, computing or data storage equipment can be damaged by high temperatures and humidity.
- 3. Loss of water and sanitary services** If you are on well water, you won't be able to do the cleaning necessary to recover.
- 4. Loss of refrigeration and consequent spoilage of any pharmaceuticals stored in a controlled environment**

### What Type of Generator Is Recommended?

Simply using portable gas generators is not the best option. During Superstorm Sandy, gasoline was scarce. Businesses with **installed standby generators**

running on natural gas or propane were able to continue servicing customers. By contrast, many portable generators cannot handle the load of refrigeration and AC compressors and fans. Power loads for a clinic will oftentimes be too much for the typical portable generator.

An additional advantage of installed standby generators (versus their portable counterparts) is that you don't have to be present to start them. Many standby generators come with a notification option through a management app on your mobile device. Standby generators also have the advantage of not requiring on-site fuel storage, which poses a significant risk.

Talk to a licensed electrician; many are authorized dealers trained to install standby generators.

### An Additional Word of Caution

When using portable generators, be extremely careful of placement. Each year, there is loss of life due to carbon monoxide poisoning from portable emergency generators. Placing a generator anywhere inside a building—even in a garage—is prohibited under any circumstance.

Make sure you have carbon monoxide detectors and check them every time you check your smoke detectors. Even then, your typical carbon monoxide detector alarms at levels too high for small animals to tolerate. Purchase digital CO detectors that alarm at 35 PPM.

One last item: Any generator you purchase needs to be a quiet (low decibel) generator; options as low as 60 dB are available. Vibration mounts are a must.

As always, consult with your local building code department and always use a licensed electrician! ■

<sup>1</sup>Superstorm Sandy By The Numbers 10 Years Later | The Weather Channel

