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As load shedding returns, here's how to keep your generator legal

A new round of load shedding has recently been announced, which means our towns are about to come alive with the sound of generators. But if you have a backup generator for your home, make sure it's installed professionally and operated correctly, or you risk not being covered for any damages that may result.

That's the warning from King Price client experience partner Wynand van Vuuren, who says it's vital that alternative power supplies like generators are installed and certified by accredited electricians.

"Thousands of people use portable generators to keep a few home essentials going when the power goes off. But what most people don't know is that you've got to have them installed professionally.

"You can't just run an extension cord from your generator into a wall outlet. Not only is it dangerous and illegal, but it could also put you at risk," Van Vuuren explains.

Top tips for using a generator safely during load shedding include:

• Install it correctly. Plugging your generator into a wall plug is known as 'back feeding', and it's a bad idea. To stay legal and covered for any damages, install a manual transfer switch that distributes power safely.

• Keep the area clear. Generators are small engines, and as such, give off a lot of heat. Wear protective gloves before touching your generator, and prevent fires by keeping it well clear of any items stored in your garage. You should also keep a fire extinguisher close at hand.

SAFETY FIRST: Make sure your generator is ventilated and operated in open areas to prevent carbon monoxide build-up

• Make sure it's ventilated. It's essential that portable generators are operated in open areas with good air flow to prevent carbon monoxide build-up. Some generator owners invest in a carbon monoxide detector to be safe. Fuel should also be stored safely, with adequate ventilation.

• Keep it tidy. All power cords should be kept clear of any footpaths, and should be checked regularly for any damage that could cause a fire.

• Keep all bases covered. Make sure that your generator or inverter powers your electric fence, gate and alarm as well as the TV and kitchen essentials, as burglars are all too quick to exploit opportunities caused by power outages.

If you don't have an alternative power supply, make sure your fence, gate and alarm have a battery back-up that's sufficient to see you through your darkest moments.

• Ensure your generator is covered. You would typically insure a portable generator under your home contents. A stationary generator becomes a fixed fitting once installed, and must be added to your buildings cover.

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