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CAPE COD HOME

Whole-House Generator Installation on Cape Cod: Permits, Costs, and What to Know

A free field guide from the people who actually live here.



When a nor'easter or hurricane knocks out power on Cape Cod — and it will — the homes with a standby generator ride it out in warmth and light while everyone else empties the fridge and drives off-Cape to find a hotel. For year-rounders, second-home owners worried about frozen pipes, and anyone who works from home, a whole-house standby generator has become one of the more sensible Cape Cod investments. But it's a permitted, professionally-installed system, not a plug-in gadget. Here's what to know. (Permits, codes, fuel options, and costs vary by town and installer — confirm current specifics with licensed local pros and your town.)

Portable vs. standby (what “whole-house” means)

Type	What it does	Trade-off
Portable generator	Powers a few essentials via cords/inlet	Cheap, but manual, limited, needs refueling
Standby (whole-house)	Permanently installed; auto-starts on outage, powers the home	Costs more; professionally installed; hands-off

A **standby generator** sits outside like an AC unit, connects to your electrical panel through an **automatic transfer switch**, and **starts itself within seconds of an outage** — no cords, no manual start. That automatic, whole-home coverage is the appeal, especially for a second home where nobody's there to start a portable unit when the power drops.

Why the Cape is prime generator country

- **Storms.** Nor'easters and hurricanes cause outages that can last hours to days.
- **Frozen-pipe protection.** For a second home, a generator that keeps the heat on during a winter outage prevents burst pipes — potentially paying for itself in one storm.
- **Well and septic pumps.** Homes on wells lose water in an outage without power; a generator keeps essentials running.
- **Work-from-home.** An outage no longer means a lost workday.

Fuel: propane vs. natural gas

Standby generators typically run on **propane** or **natural gas**: - **Natural gas** (where available) means an unlimited fuel supply via the utility line — but gas availability is limited in parts of the Cape. - **Propane** is common on the Cape and requires a tank (owned or leased) sized for meaningful runtime. Plan tank size around how long you'd want to run during an extended outage.

Your installer will help match fuel and sizing to your home and location.

The install is a permitted, professional job

This is not a DIY project. A proper standby-generator installation involves:

1. **Sizing** the generator to the loads you want to cover (whole house vs. essential circuits).
2. **Electrical work** — the transfer switch and panel connection, by a **licensed electrician**.
3. **Fuel connection** — gas/propane by a licensed professional.

4. **Permits and inspection** — electrical and often gas permits from your town; inspection sign-off.
5. **A safe, code-compliant location** — clearances from windows/doors, and consideration of flood zones and noise.

Cost and planning notes

- **Cost varies widely** with generator size, fuel, tank, electrical complexity, and site conditions — **get multiple quotes** from licensed local installers.
- **Sizing is the key decision** — “whole house” costs more than “essential circuits” (heat, well, fridge, some lights). Decide what you truly need to run.
- **Maintenance matters** — standby units need periodic service to be there when you need them; ask about maintenance plans.
- **Flood zones** — placement and elevation of the unit matter in flood-prone spots.

Don’t-miss cautions

- **Never run any generator (portable especially) in an enclosed space** — carbon monoxide kills. Standby units are installed outdoors with proper clearances for this reason.
- **Permits protect you** — an uninspected, improperly-connected generator is a safety and insurance risk. Use licensed pros and pull permits.
- **Size for your real needs**, not the biggest unit a salesperson pushes.

Don’t miss: getting the sizing and fuel decision right with a licensed local installer, and pulling the proper permits. On storm-prone Cape Cod — especially for a second home vulnerable to a winter outage and frozen pipes — a correctly-installed standby generator is genuine peace of mind. Do it right (professionally installed, permitted, properly sized) and it’s there, automatically, exactly when the lights go out.

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