



City of Mill Valley Planning & Building Department

Residential Back-up Generators

General Information & Permitting Process

26 Corte Madera Ave., Mill Valley, CA 94941 ▪ 415-388-4033 ▪ cityofmillvalley.org

Purpose

Various permits may be required to be issued prior to the installation of a generator.

- The Planning Department will review the location of generators and their noise output.
- The Building Department is responsible for issuing a building permit for the generator.
- The Fire Department has requirements on type and amount of fuel required for the generator.

Note: Portable generators that operate with extension cords and are not permanently attached to a structure do not require a permit. All generators are subject to the City's noise limits.

Building Department Application Requirements

- Building Permit Application**, available on the City's [website](#), or at the public counter in City Hall
- Site Plan** of the property, drawn to scale, that indicates the proposed location of the generator
- Product specification** (unit type, notice specifications, etc.)
- Manufacturer's installation instructions**
- Electrical single line diagram including wire size, indicate transfer switch, OR**
- Gas-line schematic showing size and type of pipe, if not a dedicated installation, BTU requirements of generator, location of gas shut-off valve and sedimentary trap**

Applicable Fees (less than 10% of job value)

- Building Permit Fee
- Rough All – MEP Minimum
- Road Impact Fee
- Additional Plan Check
- Technology Fee
- General Plan Maintenance fee
- Miscellaneous fees: (document storage, State conservation fee- Residential, Building Standard Admin)

Site Plan (provide 5 copies of site plan and 2 copies of manufacturers specifications/ installation instructions)

- Show distance from generator to combustible construction, operable door or window (minimum 5-foot distance must be shown on site plan)
- Show distance from generator to property lines and setbacks. Generator cannot be located inside setback areas
- Noise levels cannot exceed 45 dBA (daytime hours) at or beyond the nearest property line
- Show location of trench for gas line (if applicable)
- Show location of trench for electrical conduit (if applicable)

Fire Department Requirements

The following items are guidelines for fire and life safety requirements for installed emergency generators. Please note, a permit is not required for portable generators or any generator that is not fixed to a concrete pad and fed by a natural gas line.

- 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 main electrical panel shall provide signage that the building is powered by an alternate energy source
- The generator shall be able to be shut off at the main gas line for the structure

Planning Department Requirements

Setbacks (measured from property lines)

Exterior (Street frontage)	15 feet
Interior (Side and Rear)	One foot for every 1,000 square feet of effective lot area, between 5' minimum to 15' maximum. <i>(e.g., If a lot is 7,500 square feet, the interior setback is 7.5 feet)</i>
Creeks	No structures are permitted within 30 feet measured from the top of bank of the following creeks within the City of Mill Valley: Warner Canyon, Corte Madera Del Presidio, Sutton Manor Creek, Cascade Creek, Old Mill Creek, and Reed Creek

Noise Requirements

Exterior noise, measured at the property line adjacent to the generator, shall not exceed the noise limit specified by MVMC 7.16.060. If generator noise exceeds the noise limit at the property line, noise attenuation measures shall be incorporated to make the unit compliant.

Noise Limits – by Zone	Time	Noise Level (dBA)*
Single-Family Residential	9pm – 7am	45*
	7am – 9pm	50*
Multi-Family Residential	9pm – 7am	50*
	7am – 9pm	55*
Commercial	9pm – 7am	55*
	7am – 9pm	65*
*The numerical limits shall be adjusted by the addition of the following adjustments where appropriate	Noise contains a steady audible tone, such as a whine, screen, or hum. Noise is repetitive, impulsive noise such as hammering, riveting, or barking.	-5

Noise Exemption

Pursuant to MVMC Section 7.16.080(D), the use of backup emergency generators is allowed during a prolonged power outage or emergency, as declared by the City of Mill Valley, state, or local government agency, provided that the generator's owner has a building permit, and the generator complies with current fire and building codes. During a prolonged power outage period, generators for commercial uses may operate 24 hours per day but should be shut off when not critically needed to minimize the disturbance to neighbors. Generators for residential uses **shall comply with setback standards** of the underlying zoning district and be placed in an area that is reasonably practical for the homeowner and is least disruptive to neighbors. **Generators supporting residential uses shall not be operated during the hours of 9:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m., except as required for a bonafide health or medical need.** Testing of emergency generators shall be limited to the hours between 9:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. on any day and shall be limited in duration to that specified by manufacturer specifications. **Generator installations require a building permit from the City's Building Division.** For the purpose of this section a "prolonged power outage" means a power outage that is no less than 4 hours in duration.

Additional Information

Sound Attenuation Measures – There are many options for mitigating sound, including increased distance from the receiver, earth berms/slopes, walls, and specifically-designed enclosures (i.e. ZombieBox). You will need to verify with the generator manufacturer that your proposed sound attenuation measures will not void the unit's warranty. Further information about one noise reduction enclosure is available at this website:

- **ZombieBox** - www.zombie-box.com

Bay Area Air Quality Management District: Separate approval by Bay Area Air Quality Management District required for combustion engines, 50 brake horsepower (bhp) and larger. For more information, go to BAAMD website at: <https://www.baaqmd.gov/permits/apply-for-a-permit/engine-permits>