



December 14, 2017

Greg Wischstadt, President, Board of Directors  
Greg Marchand, Chair, Technical Committee  
Portable Generator Manufacturers' Association  
1300 Sumner Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44115-2851

Dear Mr. Wischstadt and Mr. Marchand:

Consumer Reports, an independent, nonprofit organization that works side by side with consumers to create a fairer, safer, and healthier world, writes regarding the draft voluntary standard proposed by the Portable Generator Manufacturers' Association (PGMA) for recognition by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).<sup>1</sup> This draft adds important provisions for the performance and safety of portable generators, including steps to help reduce carbon monoxide poisoning deaths and injuries, but it also has significant shortcomings. While we recognize the progress that already has been made, and we would not want to let the perfect be the enemy of the good, we urge PGMA to expeditiously make key changes to the standard that would improve its ability to adequately reduce the risk of injury.

As a participant in the canvass review of this draft standard, Consumer Reports has elected to submit comments, but to abstain from voting either affirmative or negative. This vote to abstain reflects several conclusions we have reached based on available evidence. One is that the proposed revisions to the standard generally would improve the quality and safety of new portable generators that consumers buy and use. Unlike the existing version of the standard, portions of the new draft seek, in a meaningful way, to address the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning to consumers. At the same time, our vote to abstain also reflects that there are aspects of the standard that do not adequately account for consumer safety—top of which is the current language recommending a minimum distance for portable generator placement of only five feet. In addition, PGMA should commit to robustly monitor the standard's effectiveness and to review the standard for necessary updates not less than 12 months after its effective date.

We strongly urge PGMA to strengthen the instructions on units and in its operator's manual in order to recommend that portable generators never be placed within 15 feet—and, ideally, 20 feet—of windows, doors, vents, or any structure that might be occupied.<sup>2</sup> Such a recommendation would align with the most conclusive safety data that is publicly available,<sup>3</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> This draft standard, BSR/PGMA G300-201x, *Safety and Performance of Portable Generators*, is a proposed revision to the current ANSI/PGMA G300-2015 standard.

<sup>2</sup> BSR/PGMA G300-201x (Nov. 14, 2017) at the eighth bullet of 7.2.2.4 and the first bullet of 8.6.

<sup>3</sup> See *Liangzhu, W., Emmerich, S.J., and Powell, R.* (July 2010) National Institute of Standards and Technology Technical Note 1666 (July 2010).

come closer to the recommendations of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and Generac for units to be placed at least 20 feet away.<sup>4</sup>

We cannot support the draft standard's current provisions requiring only a 5-foot minimum generator distance from structures, as they do not ensure an adequate margin of safety for consumers.<sup>5</sup> The phrases in these provisions about placing units “outdoors, far away from windows, doors and vents, and ... with engine exhaust directed away from occupied structures,” are appropriate and we support their inclusion. However, we have not seen detailed data to support instructions indicating to consumers that it is safe for a portable generator to be placed just over five feet from windows, doors, or vents. We are very concerned that the language of a “never within 5 feet” recommendation would sharply conflict with crucial safety recommendations and messages to the public and potentially increase the risk of injury by consumers. Moreover, any specific minimum distance instruction for portable generator placement—which, again, should recommend that portable generators never be placed within 15 feet, and ideally not within 20 feet—should refer not just to “windows, doors, or vents” but also to a broader universe, including any structure that might be occupied.

We also encourage certain technical edits,<sup>6</sup> including adding a recommendation to the operator's manual instructions that electrical cords used with portable generators should be at least 30 feet long. Cord length is one factor that should be addressed to reduce carbon monoxide-related injuries and deaths, and this change would provide another indication to consumers that it is not safe to place a portable generator within just a few feet of their homes. To further address the potential that short cords might send the wrong message to consumers, we encourage PGMA to work with electrical cord manufacturers so that they do not produce cords for use with portable generators that are less than 30 feet long. Space permitting, longer cords allow a portable generator to be placed a sufficient distance from a home or other structure and also reach a transfer switch.

More broadly, Consumer Reports believes that a comprehensive solution to carbon monoxide injuries and deaths associated with portable generators should incorporate both reduced carbon monoxide emissions criteria and a shutoff mechanism for when concentrations of

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., CPSC, “Portable Generators: 3 Critical Precautions to Take So You Don't Die from Carbon Monoxide Poisoning” (Sept. 15, 2017) (online at [onsafety.cpsc.gov/blog/2017/09/15/portable-generators-3-critical-precautions-to-take-so-you-dont-die-from-carbon-monoxide-poisoning](https://onsafety.cpsc.gov/blog/2017/09/15/portable-generators-3-critical-precautions-to-take-so-you-dont-die-from-carbon-monoxide-poisoning)); CDC, “Carbon Monoxide - Generator Safety Fact Sheet” (Sept. 11, 2017) (online at [www.cdc.gov/co/generatorsafetyfactsheet.html](https://www.cdc.gov/co/generatorsafetyfactsheet.html)); Generac Power Systems, “Avoiding the Deadly Threat of Carbon Monoxide” (Oct. 3, 2017) (online at [www.generac.com/generac-nation-newsletter/current-articles/threat-of-carbon-monoxide](https://www.generac.com/generac-nation-newsletter/current-articles/threat-of-carbon-monoxide)).

<sup>5</sup> *Supra* note 2. We recognize that the current CPSC mandatory label to warn of the danger of carbon monoxide poisoning (a copy of which is incorporated into Annex A of the draft PGMA standard) does not include a specific minimum distance instruction for the placement of portable generators away from structures, and, in principle and in the absence of such an instruction on the mandatory label, we support adding a sufficiently robust version of such an instruction to the unit and operator's manual via the ANSI/PGMA G300 standard. See 16 C.F.R. Part 1407.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the change discussed here, we make suggestions on our submitted comment form related to clarifying the meaning of “design life,” detailing the frequency of carbon monoxide measurements, and clarifying the tamper resistance provision, all in 3.9.1. We also encourage a change at 8.6 to include safety recommendations related to the operation of a portable generator in direct exposure to rain, snow, or other precipitation.

the gas reach hazardous levels. Emissions reductions and a detection-shutoff approach are mutually reinforcing, not mutually exclusive, and implementing both in a compatible and effective manner would provide consumers the strongest protection from poisoning. The eventual goal for manufacturers, regulators, and consumers alike should be a single, strong, enforceable standard that incorporates both approaches, achieves substantial compliance, and adequately reduces the risk of injury from carbon monoxide poisoning and other safety hazards associated with portable generators.

While PGMA and its member companies' recent efforts have yielded progress toward an improved ANSI/PGMA standard, the lack of available data to support effectiveness claims raises questions about just how effective the draft standard would be once implemented. PGMA has indicated, according to the results of manufacturer assessments, that the relevant provisions in the draft standard—those related to shutting off a portable generator engine when ambient carbon monoxide concentrations exceed a specified level<sup>7</sup>—would provide 99.9% effectiveness in averting fatalities, as measured under the same criteria used by the 2016 CPSC notice of proposed rulemaking for a portable generators safety standard.<sup>8</sup> While this claim is encouraging, we have not been provided the access to data necessary to facilitate an independent evaluation of the claimed effectiveness. Similarly, we understand that neither the CPSC nor any other entity unaffiliated with PGMA has, as of yet, completed an independent evaluation of the draft standard's projected effectiveness.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, we understand that implementing a revised PGMA standard quickly, and getting safer products on the market as soon as possible, is a priority of many stakeholders.<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly, if the proposed revisions to the PGMA standard at 3.9 and 6.2.11 are adopted as-is, we call on PGMA to formally confirm that it will remain open to revising the standard as necessary for consumer safety. More specifically, we urge PGMA to commit to set up working groups charged with monitoring key aspects of the standard's effectiveness, and to review the standard for necessary updates not less than 12 months after its effective date and at least once a year for several years thereafter. These steps would help ensure that there are appropriate fora for all interested parties to report on lessons from the marketplace and identify best practices, safety problems that are not being sufficiently addressed, and necessary refinements to the standard. These steps also would help ensure that stakeholders are able to assess, on a regular basis, whether generators conforming to the standard adequately reduce the risk of injury to consumers.

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<sup>7</sup> Generally, BSR/PGMA G300-201x (Nov. 14, 2017) at 3.9 and 6.2.11.

<sup>8</sup> PGMA, "Rationale for Proposed Revisions to PGMA G300 to Address CO Safety" (Oct. 26, 2017); 81 Fed. Reg. 83556. PGMA also has stated publicly, "All data sources predict that auto-shutdown will result in a significant reduction in fatalities and injuries related to the misuse of the product by stopping the source of the carbon monoxide." PGMA, "Portable Generator Manufacturers' Association announces breakthrough technology to address carbon monoxide hazard in updated standard," press release (Oct. 26, 2017) (online at [www.pgmaonline.com/pdf/PGMAUpdateReleaseFinal102617.pdf](http://www.pgmaonline.com/pdf/PGMAUpdateReleaseFinal102617.pdf))

<sup>9</sup> PGMA webinar (Nov. 9, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Id. It also is a priority of Consumer Reports to help bring safer products to market as soon as possible.

Thank you for your consideration of our vote and our comments, including the issues raised in this letter. We look forward to your response, and to continuing to work together to eliminate deaths and injuries associated with portable generators.

Sincerely,

Mark Connelly  
Senior Director, Product Testing  
Consumer Reports<sup>11</sup>

David Friedman  
Director, Cars and Product Policy and Analysis  
Consumers Union<sup>12</sup>

Don Huber  
Director, Product Safety  
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John Galeotafiore  
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cc: *ANSI Procedures and Standards Administration department*

*Members of the Portable Generator Manufacturers' Association: A-iPower Corp., American Honda Motor Co., Briggs & Stratton Corporation, Champion Power Equipment, Generac Power Systems, GenTent Safety Canopies, Wacker Neuson Production Americas, and Yamaha Motor Corp.*

*Portable Generator Manufacturers' Association staff: Ms. Susan Orega, Executive Director; Mr. Joseph Harding, Technical Director*

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<sup>11</sup> Consumer Reports, the world's largest independent product-testing organization, uses its more than 50 labs, auto test center, and survey research center to rate thousands of products and services annually. Founded in 1936, Consumer Reports has over 7 million subscribers to its magazine, website, and other publications.

<sup>12</sup> Consumers Union is the policy and mobilization division of Consumer Reports.