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**Startin the Fire
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“Is electric service provided at a contest or do we have to bring a generator?”

The first thing you need to do is to analyze your own power needs. Do you need electric to run your cookers? (fans, temperature controls, etc) Is there a camper or motor home in your entourage? If so, what are its power requirements? What do you use for lighting to see at night? Do you have any special power needs?

Once you have a good idea of the power that you need to efficiently operate, the next step would be to look over the information provided for the contest that you would like to enter. Each venue is different, some can provide all the power that you need, some charge extra if you need more amps, some do not provide power at all.

You need to read the available information over very carefully. If the answers to your question are not right there, call or e mail the contest organizers and ask. Some contests do not allow generators. If generators are allowed, are there limitations as to when they can operate? Read the info over very carefully and know the answers to the questions before you arrive on site. It is a good idea to know the answers before sending in your entry fee. If the power availability and or limitations will affect the success of your cook, you may have to consider passing on the contest, or at the very least, have a backup plan.

Most organizers will work with you to be sure you have the power that you need. This may involve citing you in a special location to be able to accommodate your needs. The important thing here is to let them know ahead of time what your power needs and expectations are. Try and avoid pulling into the contest on Friday morning and demanding a direct line to the local power plant.

Many contests employ temporary electrical service arrangements to supply power to the teams, often times, this involves extension cords and splitters. Sometimes, you may find yourself at the end of a very long run where the power supply is very weak. Throw some rain into the mix, along with the guy three sites up drawing enough power to light a small city and you have got yourself some electrical problems.

If you've got to have power to operate, it makes sense to have a back up plan. If generators are permitted, it is a good idea to have one along in the event of intermittent or complete power failure. Battery backups are another good choice when it comes to auxiliary or alternate power sources. Just be sure that you have the necessary equipment to safely transfer battery power to your needed equipment and can do so without completely draining the battery that you may need on Saturday to say, start your truck.

Battery operated lanterns and flashlights are important items to include into your equipment list. You might also consider propane fueled lanterns as a backup lighting source. Many cooks use the strap-on headlamps when operating in low light situations.

The key here is planning and preparation, know your electrical requirements. Review the contest power supply notes, including any restrictions on generators, and plan accordingly. As in any other well run operation, good planning is key to its success.