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INSIDE THE CURRENT ISSUE

September 2007

Having My Say

Compact standby power unit provides affordable backup for in-office procedures

with Marianne Strausser, R.N.

Electric power interruptions, a dangerous problem in the operating suite, are universal occurrences that are becoming ever more frequent in many areas. Whether due to local voltage sags, regional brownouts or outages from storms, the need for backup systems has become a must for medical offices that perform surgeries or other procedures that depend on continuous electric power.

While hospitals and medical centers have been installing "uninterruptible power supplies" (UPS) and standby electric generators for some time now, such systems are very expensive and often do not fit either the pocketbook or space of smaller medical facilities. Yet, reliable backup power is increasingly a requirement of state regulations as well as certification by various medical accrediting bodies. In fact, backup power systems may be the standard of care in many communities throughout North America.



MEDI+Products

"In Florida and many other states, the state law says you must have reliable backup power," said Marianne Strausser, R.N., a consultant for the design and accreditation and inspection requirements of operating suites in the Florida area. Backup power between 90 minutes and two hours is also required for accreditation by the AAAASF (American Association for Accreditation of Ambulatory Surgery Facilities), AAAHC (Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care), and JCAHO (Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations).

"Essentially, this means that any physician who is performing surgery or other procedures where the patient is anesthetized for five minutes or longer must have a reliable standby electric power system in order to receive and maintain accreditation," Strausser explained.

Strausser initially began researching standby power systems for the operating suites of plastic surgeons clients. In conjunction with her other design capabilities, she quickly determined that among the many battery-based systems available, very few were actually appropriate for the operating suites of those who need standby power, such as cosmetic surgeons, cardiologists, OB-GYNs, oncologists, pain management specialists and others.

Compact size is big

"The operating rooms of these physicians are relatively small," Strausser said. "So, when they install new equipment, it is usually for a good reason because there is always the question of where is it going to fit."

While Strausser often assists in the design of new OR suites, where backup power systems may be integrated into the walls, more frequently such systems are placed within the suite and have surgical lights and anesthesia systems and other equipment plugged into them.

After extensive research, Strausser found a highly compact and portable system

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After extensive research, Strausser found a highly compact and portable system manufactured by MEDI+ Products Inc. (Stamford, CT), the battery-operated Reassurance Backup Power System.

"The system's compact size allows you the flexibility to locate it in a place where it won't get in the way," Strausser said. "And the unit is designed so that you can hard wire the AC source (for battery charging) as well as outlets powering equipment. It is easy to use, too - basically plug and play."

Of course, the portability of the system also permits users to move the system from one operating suite to another, if appropriate for the practice.

Staying power is vital

Strausser pointed out that it is essential to meet the unique backup power requirements of each facility, both in terms of the amount of power and longevity of power.

"Practices have requirements and preferences," she explained. "In some cases there are surgical lights and monitoring equipment that must be supported simultaneously. In other instances, the requirements may be minimal. But whatever the need, it is mandatory that the power be available for a few hours of operation. Strausser added that she prefers the Reassurance system because it can be customized to meet the users' power requirements and operate reliably for up to five hours.

"If you have a power outage, you may want to complete one or more procedures that will require longevity of power," she advised.

Even some sophisticated backup electric power systems take moments to "power up" during outages. In the operating suite, this is not the optimal situation, since equipment can shut down during even a brief interruption.

Therefore, Strausser highly recommends the use of a standby system that will activate instantaneously during a power interruption.

"One of the reasons that I frequently recommend the Reassurance system is that it is automatically activated in about a heartbeat whenever a power failure occurs," she said. "Then, after the normal power comes back on, the system automatically recharges itself."

Strausser added that the reliability of the backup system also depends on the quality and condition of the batteries. "You want to be sure that the power is there when you need it," she said. "Plus, replacing batteries can be quite expensive. Another reason I like the Reassurance is that the batteries will probably last for three years or so."

It is important to keep all ORs and surgical facilities hygienic, and that includes the equipment in them.

"One of the reasons that I prefer the MEDI+Products (Reassurance) system is that it has a stainless steel cabinet," she explained. "That makes it easy to keep clean. You can wipe the surface down with a bactericidal or whatever you would normally use on other OR equipment. No harsh cleaning agents are necessary." A stainless steel finish gives the system a very professional appearance, which is important for a medical environment, Strausser noted.

Designed by engineers with bio-medical backgrounds, the Reassurance System is easy to install and use, and can be customized to suit a user's needs and are capable of powering lights and various motor-driven appliances, x-rays and lasers. **HPN**

MEDI+Products offers a free evaluation of facility backup power requirements via the firm's web site, <http://www.mediproducts.net/>. For more information about Accreditation & Certification Services, which specializes in assisting plastic surgeons to develop and/or certify their in-office surgical facilities, contact Strausser at 941-955-9096.



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