

POWER OUTAGES AND BLACKOUTS

Power outages and blackouts can happen for a variety of reasons and can last for a few hours, a few days or even a few weeks. Regardless of the reasons, you and your family should know some of the basic steps to stay safe when there is an outage. Making sure your [Emergency Supply Kit](#) and [Family Communication Plans](#) are up to date is a great start.

PREPARE YOUR HOME

- ❖ If you use medication that requires refrigeration, most can be kept in a closed refrigerator for several hours without a problem. If you are unsure, check with your physician or pharmacist. (You may want to check with your physician or pharmacist before a blackout happens!)
- ❖ Back up computer files and operating systems. Consider buying extra batteries and a power converter if you use a laptop computer. Remember you should back up your computer files on a regular basis – you generally will not know when there will be an outage.
- ❖ Get a high-quality surge protector for your electronic equipment.
- ❖ If you have an electric garage door opener, find out where the manual release lever is located and learn how to operate it.
- ❖ If you have a telephone at home or at work that requires electricity to work (such as a cordless phone), plan for alternate communication, including having a standard telephone handset, cellular telephone, radio or pager. Cordless phones will not work during a power outage.
- ❖ Keep your car fuel tank at least half-full – gas stations rely on electricity to power the pumps.
- ❖ Remember that equipment such as automated teller machines (ATMs) may not work during a power outage, so make sure you have extra cash at home.
- ❖ Know if you live in an area that has rolling blackouts. A rolling blackout occurs when a power company turns off electricity to selected areas to save power. The blackouts are typically for one hour, then the power is restored and another area is turned off. Hospitals, airport control towers, police stations, and fire departments are often exempt from these rolling blackouts. Rolling Blackouts can happen at any time of day and may affect the same area more than once a day.

SAFETY INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- ❖ If you use a battery-operated wheelchair, life-support system, or other power-dependent equipment, call your power company before blackouts happen. Many

utility companies keep a list and map of the locations of power-dependent customers in case of an emergency. Ask them what alternatives are available in your area. Contact the customer service department of your local utility company(ies) to learn if this service is available in your community.

- ❖ If you use a motorized wheelchair or scooter, have an extra battery. A car battery also can be used with a wheelchair but will not last as long as a wheelchair's deep-cycle battery. If available, store a lightweight manual wheelchair for backup.
- ❖ If you have a visual disability, store a talking or Braille clock or large-print timepiece with extra batteries.
- ❖ If you have a hearing loss, consider getting a small portable battery-operated television set. Emergency broadcasts may give information in American Sign Language (ASL) or open captioning.

WHAT TO DO DURING A POWER OUTAGE

- ❖ Only use flashlights for emergency lighting. Never use candles, they are a fire hazard!
- ❖ Never run a generator inside a home or garage.
- ❖ If you use a generator, connect the equipment you want to power directly into the outlets on the generator. Do not connect a generator to a home's electrical system.
- ❖ Turn off or disconnect any appliances, equipment (like air conditioners) or electronics you were using when the power went out. When power comes back on, it may come back with momentary "surges" or "spikes" that can damage equipment such as computers and motors in appliances like the air conditioner, refrigerator, washer, or furnace.
- ❖ Leave one light turned on so you will know when your power returns.
- ❖ Leave the doors of your refrigerator and freezer closed to keep your food as fresh as possible. If you must eat food that was refrigerated or frozen, check it carefully for signs of spoilage.
- ❖ Use the phone for emergencies only. Listening to a portable radio can provide the latest information. Do not call 9-1-1 for information – only call to report a life-threatening emergency.
- ❖ Eliminate unnecessary travel, especially by car. Traffic signals will stop working during an outage, creating traffic congestion.
- ❖ Remember that equipment such as automated teller machines (ATMs) and elevators may not work during a power outage.

- ❖ If it is hot outside, take steps to remain cool. Move to the lowest level of your home, as cool air falls. Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing. Drink plenty of water, even if you do not feel thirsty. If the heat is intense and the power may be off for a long time, consider going to a movie theater, shopping mall, or "cooling shelter" that may be opened in your community.
- ❖ Remember to provide plenty of fresh, cool water for your pets.
- ❖ If it is cold outside, put on layers of warm clothing. Never burn charcoal for heating or cooking indoors. Never use your oven as a source of heat. If the power may be out for a prolonged period, plan to go to another location (relative, friend, or public facility) that has heat to keep warm.

FOOD SAFETY

If the power is out for less than 2 hours, then the food in your refrigerator and freezer will be safe to consume. While the power is out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to keep food cold for longer.

If the power is out for longer than 2 hours, follow the guidelines below:

- ❖ For the Freezer section: A freezer that is half-full will hold food safely for up to 24 hours. A full freezer will hold food safely for 48 hours. Do not open the freezer door if you can avoid it.
- ❖ For the Refrigerated section: Pack milk, other dairy products, meat, fish, eggs, gravy, and spoilable leftovers into a cooler surrounded by ice. Inexpensive Styrofoam coolers are fine for this purpose.
- ❖ Use a food thermometer to check the temperature of your food right before you cook or eat it. Throw away any food that has a temperature of more than 40 degrees Fahrenheit.