

Tips for Weathering a Power Outage

Individuals and families are responsible for preparing for emergencies. One of the most common is a power outage. Most of us don't realize how dependent we are on electricity. Here are a few tips to help you and your family take care of your basic needs until power is restored:

Light: Have plenty of battery powered flashlights and extra batteries on hand. Do not use gas powered camping lanterns or candles. They are a fire and carbon monoxide hazard.

Heat: Dress warmly and use extra blankets. While some heating systems are gas powered, the thermostats are electric. If you are having trouble getting warm, take a hot shower if your water heater is working, or use water heated on the stove (being very careful not to get it too hot!). Do not use fuel-powered heaters or barbecues in the house.

Food: Most refrigerators are well insulated. Placing block ice in the refrigerator can keep food cool for a couple of days. Think about what you want out of the refrigerator before opening the door, and close it quickly afterwards. Use canned foods that do not require cooking. Do not use hibachis or barbecue grills in the house.

Communication: Use battery powered radios to listen to important information. New weather radios have alert capability that will activate the radio when the Emergency Alert System is activated in your area. Be sure to have plenty of extra batteries. If you live alone or have special needs, have a plan in place where a friend, neighbor, or family member visits you when the telephone system doesn't work. Wireless telephones may not work if the base unit does not have a battery as well. Use a "normal" telephone that plugs directly into the wall or plug your base unit into a UPS (Uninterruptable Power Supply).

Special Needs: If you require power to operate equipment that you need to mitigate a disability or to maintain or take medication, activate your mutual aid system, asking a friend, neighbor, or family member to assist you. If it is a *life-threatening situation*, you should call 911. Think about what other devices or backup methods could be used that don't require power or can use alternative power such as commercially available batteries.

Appliances: Unplug appliances when the power is out. The surge from the power when it is restored can damage some appliances such as refrigerators and televisions.

Generators: Generators should only be used outdoors. Unless you have a professionally installed transfer switch, appliances and equipment should be plugged directly into the generator. Failure to do so can kill workers on the power line and increase the danger of fire in your home. A UPS (Uninterruptable Power Supply), most commonly used with computers, is also useful for powering other devices within its power range. Check the manufacturer's recommendations. DC to AC converters are also available from hardware, RV, auto parts, and marine supply stores that can convert battery power from your car to AC power for needed appliances. Alternative energy sources using wind and solar power are also available. Check you local listings under Solar Energy or Recreational Vehicle Repair and Service.

For more information on electrical backup, consult with a licensed electrician and your medical device provider.