

Coping During a Power Outage

Power outages can occur for many different reasons. Wind, snow, rain and ice storms can cause the power to go out, as well as electrical failures, power surges and various other production and delivery problems.

In a world dependent on electricity to power many of the comforts of modern living, coping without electricity can be a difficult undertaking. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers the information below to help communities, families and individuals cope with power outages.

Be Prepared for an Emergency

The CDC recommends that people make an emergency plan that includes a disaster supply kit. This kit should include enough water, dried and canned food and emergency supplies (flashlights, batteries, first aid supplies, prescription medicines and a digital thermometer) to last at least three days. Use battery-powered flashlights and lanterns rather than candles, gas lanterns or torches to minimize the risk of fire.

Food Safety

If the power is out for less than two 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 longer.

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

- For the freezer: 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 refrigerator: 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.
- For safety: Use a digital quick-response 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.

Safe Drinking Water

When power goes out, water purification systems may not be functioning fully. Safe water for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene includes bottled, boiled or treated water. Your state or local health department can make specific recommendations for boiling or treating water in your area. Here are some general rules concerning water for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene:

- Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, wash your hands, make ice or make baby formula. If possible, use baby formula that does not need to have water added. You can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to wash your hands.
- If you use bottled water, be sure it came from a safe source. If you do not know that the water came from a safe source, you should boil or treat it before you use it. Use only bottled, boiled or treated water until your supply is tested and found safe.
- Boiling water, when practical, is the preferred way to kill harmful bacteria and parasites. Bringing water to a rolling boil for one minute will kill most organisms.
- When boiling water is not practical, you can treat water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets or unscented household chlorine bleach (5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite).
- If you use chlorine tablets or iodine tablets, follow the directions that come with the tablets.
- If you use household chlorine bleach, add 1/8 teaspoon of bleach per gallon of water if the water is clear. For cloudy water, add 1/4 teaspoon of bleach per gallon. Mix the solution thoroughly, and let it stand for about 30 minutes before using it.

Note: Treating water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets or liquid bleach will not kill parasitic organisms.

Use a bleach solution to rinse water containers before reusing them. Use water storage tanks and other types of containers with caution. For example, fire truck storage tanks and previously used cans or bottles may be contaminated with microbes or chemicals. Do not rely on untested devices for decontaminating water.

Extreme Heat and Cold

During power outages, people are more at-risk for experiencing extreme heat or cold. Here are some tips for dealing with these temperature-related issues.

For heat:

- Be aware of your and others' risk for heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps and fainting.
- Drink a glass of fluid, preferably water, every 15 to 20 minutes and at least one gallon each day. Avoid alcohol and caffeine. They both dehydrate the body.
- Wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- When indoors without air conditioning, open windows if outdoor air quality permits, and use fans.
- Take frequent cool showers or baths.
- If you feel dizzy, weak or overheated, go to a cool place. Sit or lie down, drink water and wash your face with cool water. If you don't feel better soon, get medical help quickly.
- Work during cooler hours of the day when possible, or distribute the workload evenly throughout the day.

Hypothermia happens when a person's core body temperature is lower than 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit). Hypothermia has three levels: acute, subacute and chronic.

For cold:

- Acute hypothermia is caused by a rapid loss of body heat, usually from immersion in cold water.
- Subacute hypothermia often happens in cool outdoor weather (below 10 degrees Celsius or 50 degrees Fahrenheit) when wind chill, wet or too little clothing, fatigue and/or poor nutrition lower the body's ability to cope with cold.
- Chronic hypothermia happens from ongoing exposure to cold indoor temperatures (below 16 degrees Celsius, or 60 degrees Fahrenheit). The poor, elderly, people who have hypothyroidism, people who take sedative-hypnotics and those who struggle with drug and alcohol addiction are prone to chronic hypothermia. They typically misjudge cold temperatures, move slowly, have poor nutrition and wear too little clothing.
- To prevent hypothermia, everyone (especially the elderly and ill) should have adequate food, clothing, shelter and sources of heat. Wear layers of clothing, which help to retain body heat. It is also important to move around. Physical activity raises body temperature.

Helping Someone who is Hypothermic

As the body temperature decreases, the person will be less awake and aware and may be confused and disoriented. Because of this, even a mildly hypothermic person might not think to help themselves. Here are some tips:

- People who have severe hypothermia must be carefully warmed, and their temperatures must be monitored.
- Do not use direct heat or hot water to warm the person.
- Do not rub or massage the skin.
- Give the person warm beverages to drink.
- Do not give the person alcohol or cigarettes. Blood flow needs to be improved, and these slow blood flow.
- Even someone who shows no signs of life should be brought quickly and carefully to a hospital or other medical facility.

First Aid for Electrical Shock

During a power outage, some downed power lines can still be "live" and cause electrocutions. If you believe someone has been electrocuted, take the following steps:

- Look first – don't touch. The person may still be in contact with the electrical source. Touching the person may pass the current through you.
- Call or have someone else call 911 or emergency medical help.
- Turn off the source of electricity, if possible. If not, move the source away from you and the affected person using a non-conducting object made of cardboard, plastic or wood.

- Once the person is free of the source of electricity, check the person's breathing and pulse. If either has stopped or seems dangerously slow or shallow, begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) immediately.
- If the person is faint or pale or shows other signs of shock, lay the person down with the head slightly lower than the trunk of their body and the legs elevated.
- Do not touch burns, break blisters or remove burned clothing. Electrical shock may cause burns inside the body, so be sure the person is taken to a doctor.

Power Line Hazards and Cars

If a power line falls on a car, you should stay inside the vehicle. This is the safest place to stay. Warn people not to touch the car or the line. Call or ask someone to call the local utility company and emergency services.

The only circumstance in which you should consider leaving a car that is in contact with a downed power line is if the vehicle catches on fire. Open the door. Do not step out of the car. You may receive a shock. Instead, jump free of the car so that your body clears the vehicle before touching the ground. Once you clear the car, shuffle at least 50 feet away with both feet on the ground.

As in all power line-related emergencies, call for help immediately by dialing 911, or call your electric utility company's service center or dispatch office.

Do not try to help someone else from the car while you are standing on the ground.

Safety at Work During Power Recovery

As power returns after an outage, people at work may be at risk of electrical or traumatic injuries as power lines are reenergized and equipment is reactivated. The CDC recommends that employers and employees be aware of those risks and take protective steps if they are in contact with or in proximity to power lines, electrical components and the moving parts of heavy machinery.

Resources

- American Red Cross: www.redcross.org/
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
- Ready.gov: www.ready.gov/

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

Web ID: LivingME

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