What To Do When the Heat Goes Out? Preparing For a Power Failure

Electricity is a relatively recent luxury that first emerged in the 19th century. Since then, however, it has become an essential part of modern society, and a major contributor to not only everyone’s standard of living, but also their good health. Electrical service is vulnerable to interruptions not only by overloaded power grids, but also by natural disasters such as blizzards, tornadoes or hurricanes. Power outages are more than mere nuisances that can deprive people of access to computers and household lighting. They can lead to the spoiling of food supplies, the reduction of hospital services, and disrupt communications. Prolonged blackouts can reduce a modern neighborhood or city to what seems like a third world existence. Outages are highly unpredictable and because of this, it is necessary for people to know not only how to cope with them, but also how to prepare in advance.

Refrigeration
To prepare for a potential power outage, residents should consider a spare cooler with a supply of ice to be a necessity, along with a thermometer, preferably a digital one. This will help ensure that if a blackout lasts more than two hours, perishable foods like meat and dairy products will stay below 40 degrees Fahrenheit, which is necessary to prevent harmful microbes from spoiling the food. Freezers will preserve frozen food for up to two days if they are full. One way to keep them full is to use ice packs, or stored ice. Opening a freezer door reduces the amount of time that it keeps food frozen, especially when it is opened during the hottest part of the day. Food that can't be kept below 40 degrees should be cooked via outside barbecue and eaten, if possible, before it warms up. If this isn't possible then it will be necessary to discard the food.

Water Safety
Power outages may disrupt the municipal water supply provider’s ability to keep water relatively purified. One essential method of preparation includes storing one gallon of water per person per day in reserve, and increasing that to one and a half gallons during the summer. Spare water can also be kept in the freezer and refrigerator’s freezer section to help keep the space packed. It is also possible to boil water in a pot over a fire for 60 seconds for use during a prolonged blackout. Boiling is the only effective way to kill potential microbes lurking in the water.

Staying Connected
Electrical service disruptions can have an adverse effect on communications as well. The FCC mandates that cell phone towers must have four hours of battery backup power, which won't last through a prolonged outage. Internet phones, or Voice-Over-IP services, are also unlikely to continue functioning. Traditional land line service will continue to work, although cordless phones will stop working unless they have a battery backup. For the sake of preparedness, it is necessary to keep land line phone service even if this amounts to an added expense.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning
Carbon monoxide is a gas with neither color nor odor, that can accumulate while burning wood or coal. In areas with poor ventilation it can subtly but rapidly displace oxygen and present a lethal hazard for residents. It is unsafe to burn wood anywhere except in a fireplace, or to burn coal inside of a house or any other enclosed structure. Burning wood in stoves is also unsafe because it leads to potentially deadly carbon monoxide buildups in the home.
Power Failures in Summer

Service disruptions in the summer can come as a result of tornadoes, hurricanes and thunderstorms, as well as an increased demand for energy due to the widespread use of air conditioners. Blackouts during this time of year are dangerous because they cut off access to air conditioning and can result in heat strokes and other heat-related health problems. To prevent these issues from occurring it will be necessary to open windows if there is a breeze outside, and to drink at least a gallon of water or non-alcoholic beverages per day per person, or more if the temperature is very hot. In addition, people should stay in the shade when possible, open windows when there is a breeze, and wear clothes with light colors because light colors help clothes to reflect light and stay cooler. Cool showers and baths also help a person keep cool, and work should be done during the cooler times of the day when possible. It will also be necessary to look out for signs of heat-related illness in oneself as well as others. These signs include the onset of nausea, weakness, dizziness, confusion, or hot and dry skin. Those suffering from these symptoms must receive immediate medical attention.

Power Failures in Winter

During the winter, accumulations of snow can collapse power lines and power poles, as can ice storms and blizzards. Homes with fireplaces, pellet stoves and gas furnaces without electric ignitions will be able to stay warm as long as its residents stock up on the proper fuel in advance. Houses without these types of heating systems will rapidly become unsafe for habitation during a prolonged period of electrical service disruption. The primary threat that people face during power outages in the winter is hypothermia, or excessively low body temperatures caused by cold or freezing external temperatures. To avert this potential health hazard it will be necessary to wear thick clothing that insulates heat. In addition, covering beds with thick sheets will insulate heat while a person sleeps. It may also be necessary for people to share body heat to stay warm longer. Symptoms of hypothermia include numbness in the feet or hands, stumbling, excessive shivering, slowed heart rate, or the onset of lethargy, confusion or delirium.

- Don't Be Left in the Dark! Weathering Floods, Storms and Power Outages (PDF): A document that provides information about what to do when the power goes out during storms. The document provides valuable advice about alternative heating, cooking, and preserving food in freezers, and other information about what to do during an outage.
- Preparing Food During a Power Failure: A page on the North Dakota State University website that discusses what method of cooking is best during a power outage. It explains what methods should not be used, and why. The page also discusses observing health precautions and conserving water during the outage.
- What You Need to Know When the Power Goes Out Suddenly: A Emergency Preparedness and Response page on the CDC website. The page explains what people should be aware of during a power outage in terms of food, water, and health. Tips are also given on the page.
- Precautions to Take Before, During Power Outages: A brief article about how to prepare for when the power goes out. It mentions the basic equipment and supplies that people should have in order to be prepared.
- Health and Safety Concerns – Power Outages: A page on the Ohio Committee for Severe Weather Awareness website that discusses power outages by providing a bullet list of safety tips during a power outage and a power outage checklist. The page also includes common questions and answers and a link to information about the safe use of generators.
- Preparing for a Power Outage at Home (PDF): Tips on how to prepare for power outages and what to do during and after a power outage. The PDF document also includes a section about portable and standby generators.
- Norfolk – Preparing for a Power Outage: A page on the Norfolk, Virginia website that reviews safety, security, and health issues that people should consider when prepare for during a power outage.
- Potential Power Outages: Tips for people to use when preparing for power outages. Some of the tips are also meant to help prevent outages from occurring.
- AZ Emergency Information Network - Power Outages: An article that tells readers what supplies are needed to create a power outage emergency kit. It also gives the readers tips on how to stay safe during a power outage.
- Power Outage and Emergency Safety: Advice on how to prepare in advance for potential power failures. The article also includes information on how to stay safe during an outage.
• How Can I Prepare Before a Blackout Happens: A page on the City of Baltimore website that lists supplies that will help residents prepare for power failure. It also gives other advice, such as backing up computer files to prevent a loss of information in the event of a blackout.

• Self Reliance During a Power Outage: Advice on how to prepare for be without power for 72 hours or longer without assistance. Advice is also given on helping children during a power outage, creating an emergency supply kit and information for people with disabilities.

• Winter Storm Power Outage Tips (PDF): A press release by the Bonneville Power Administration that outlines survival tips during a power outage. Information on how to forestall food spoilage and methods for keeping warm are included.

• Meal Preparation and Food Safety During and After a Power Failure (PDF): A University of Florida article pertaining to food safety in the event of a loss of power. This resource points out fuel conservation techniques as well as alternative methods of cooking, and ways to manage frozen foods.

• Coping With Power Failures (PDF): A publication that discusses how to cope with a long term power outage. Includes information on how to prepare before a disaster happens, as well as what to do when power comes back on.

• Winter Power Outage Tips: An article about how to handle a power outage in the winter. Contains advice on emergency preparedness as well as how to stay warm when the power goes out.

• Preparing for Power Outages: A web page by the National Center for Home Food Preservation pertaining to power outages during the summer. Visitors can find advice on how to stay cool in the summer and how to preserve food in the refrigerator or freezer.

• Being Prepared if the Power Goes Out: A Consumer Energy Center resource that addresses the issue of power outages. The article focuses on the need to have flashlights and spare batteries, issues regarding candles and candle safety, and other preparations to take before a power outage happens.

• The Red Cross: Power Outage Checklist (PDF): A publication by the Red Cross concerning power outages. This document discusses preparations, how to handle a power outage, and what to do when it's over.

• Plano: Power Outages: The City of Plano, Texas web page for power outage preparedness. This resource discusses what to do in preparation for a potential outage, what to do when one occurs, and things that should be done when the emergency is over.

Written by Ronnie Hooten

Look much more about disaster preparedness here:
www.Disaster.Preparedness.PhilippineEducation.ph