

72-Hour Household Outage Checklist

A calm, practical plan for the first three days without power. Fill it in now, while the lights are on, and keep it where everyone can find it.



How to use this checklist

- ☐ Fill in the important numbers below and the loads on page 3.
- ☐ Gather the supplies on page 2 before storm season.
- ☐ When the power goes out, follow the timeline on page 4.
- ☐ If anyone uses powered medical equipment, complete page 5 with their provider.
- ☐ Tape a copy inside a kitchen cabinet and keep a photo of it on your phone.

Important numbers

Electric utility outage line

Utility website or app

Gas utility emergency line

Emergency 911

Police and fire, non-emergency

Doctor or clinic

Pharmacy

Medical equipment supplier

Family or friend contact

Neighbor to check on

Where we would go if needed

Before an outage

Gather these now

Most of this costs little and lasts for years. Check things off as you go.

Light and power

- ☐ Flashlight or lantern for each room you use at night
- ☐ A headlamp for hands-free tasks
- ☐ Spare batteries in the sizes you need
- ☐ Phone battery banks, kept charged
- ☐ Car phone charger
- ☐ Battery-powered or hand-crank radio

Food and water

- ☐ At least 1 gallon of water per person, per day, for 3 days (more for pets, illness, or pregnancy)
- ☐ Food that needs no cooking or refrigeration
- ☐ Manual can opener
- ☐ Thermometer in the refrigerator and in the freezer
- ☐ Cooler and frozen gel packs or water bottles

Health and safety

- ☐ Carbon monoxide alarms on every level and outside sleeping areas, tested
- ☐ Smoke alarms tested, spare batteries on hand
- ☐ At least 3 days of medicines and medical supplies
- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Copies of key documents and some cash

Warmth and comfort

- ☐ Extra blankets and sleeping bags
- ☐ Hats, gloves, and warm layers for everyone
- ☐ Towels to block drafts under doors
- ☐ Know whether your furnace needs electricity
- ☐ Fireplace or fuel-burning heater inspected this year

If you have backup power

- ☐ Battery station charged, and recharged every few months
- ☐ Generator tested outdoors, with fresh fuel stored safely
- ☐ Outdoor-rated cords heavy enough for the load

Your essential loads

What matters most in your home

Rank each load 1 (must keep running), 2 (important), or 3 (nice to have).

Copy the watts from each appliance's label or manual.

Load	Priority	Watts (label)	Hours per day	Notes
Refrigerator	① ② ③			
Freezer	① ② ③			
Modem and router	① ② ③			
Phones (how many: __)	① ② ③			
Lights (how many: __)	① ② ③			
Medical device	① ② ③			
Sump pump	① ② ③			
Furnace blower	① ② ③			
Well pump	① ② ③			
	① ② ③			
	① ② ③			
	① ② ③			
My estimate (Wh)	For how many hours	My battery (Wh)		

Turn this list into numbers with the free calculator at outage.info/calculator. It adds a buffer for energy lost in conversion and a reserve, flags pumps and medical devices, and can check how long a battery would last. You can print the result and keep it with this checklist.

Pumps, furnaces, and hardwired equipment

Motors need extra power to start, and many furnaces and well pumps are wired directly into the house. Connecting backup power to home wiring requires a properly installed transfer switch or interlock and a licensed electrician.

When the power goes out

The first 72 hours

First hour

- ☐ Check your utility's outage map or app, or call the number on page 1, to report the outage
- ☐ Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed
- ☐ Switch to flashlights and lanterns instead of candles
- ☐ Unplug electronics you are not using; leave one lamp on so you know when power returns
- ☐ Stay away from downed power lines and call 911 and your utility if you see one

Hours 1 to 4

Refrigerator window

- ☐ A closed refrigerator keeps food cold for about 4 hours
- ☐ Charge phones from battery banks; turn on low-power mode
- ☐ Start backup power for priority 1 loads, if you have it
- ☐ In cold weather, choose one warm room and close off the rest

Hours 4 to 24

- ☐ Move perishable food into a cooler with ice or gel packs
- ☐ Eat refrigerated food first, then freezer food, then shelf-stable food
- ☐ Check on neighbors who live alone or rely on medical equipment
- ☐ Recharge batteries whenever you have a safe chance

Day 2

Half-full freezer window ends

- ☐ A half-full freezer holds about 24 hours; a full one about 48
- ☐ Check freezer food with the thermometer; replace ice in coolers
- ☐ Look for warming or cooling centers if the house is too cold or hot

Day 3

- ☐ Plan for food in the freezer that may no longer be safe
- ☐ If medical backup is running low, go somewhere with power
- ☐ Refill water, medicine, and battery supplies if you can do so safely

The food rule: perishable food that has been above 40°F for 2 hours or more should be thrown out. Never taste food to check it. Frozen food with ice crystals, or at 40°F or below, can be refrozen.

Powered medical equipment**Medical device plan**

Complete one box per device with help from the manufacturer, your supplier, and your healthcare provider.

Device and model _____

Serial number _____

Power use (watts) _____

Runs on battery? How long? _____

Safe time without it _____

If power fails during use _____

Supplier phone _____

Device and model _____

Serial number _____

Power use (watts) _____

Runs on battery? How long? _____

Safe time without it _____

If power fails during use _____

Supplier phone _____

Medicines that need cold

The FDA says insulin vials and cartridges can be kept unrefrigerated between 59°F and 86°F for up to 28 days. Do not use insulin that has frozen. For other medicines, ask your pharmacist now.

Before every storm

- ☐ Charge every device battery fully
- ☐ Ask your utility about programs for medical equipment users
- ☐ Confirm where you would go if backup runs out

Safety

Generator and carbon monoxide checks

Never indoors. Not in a garage. Not near openings.

Carbon monoxide has no color or smell and can kill. Opening doors or windows does not make it safe. If a carbon monoxide alarm sounds, get everyone outside and call 911.

- ☐ Run generators outdoors only, at least 20 feet from the home, with exhaust pointed away from doors, windows, and vents
- ☐ Never run a generator in a home, garage, basement, crawl space, shed, or carport
- ☐ Turn the generator off and let it cool before refueling
- ☐ Never plug a generator into a wall outlet; use a transfer switch installed by a licensed electrician
- ☐ Use only outdoor-rated cords heavy enough for the load
- ☐ Never heat your home with an oven, stove, grill, or camp stove
- ☐ Keep space heaters 3 feet from anything that can burn, plugged directly into a wall outlet

When the power comes back

- ☐ Check refrigerator and freezer thermometers before eating anything
- ☐ Throw out perishables that sat above 40°F for 2 hours or more
- ☐ Check medical devices for damage, wet parts, and correct settings
- ☐ Plug electronics back in a few at a time
- ☐ Recharge every battery and battery bank
- ☐ Turn off and cool the generator before storing it
- ☐ Restock what you used, and write down what you would change

Sources

- USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, Keeping Food Safe During an Emergency
- CDC, How to Create an Emergency Water Supply; Avoiding Carbon Monoxide Poisoning
- CPSC, winter safety tips on carbon monoxide, generators, and space heaters
- FDA, Home Use Devices: How to Prepare for and Handle Power Outages; Insulin Storage in an Emergency
- Links to all sources: outage.info/methodology and each guide on outage.info

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