



State of New Jersey Office of Emergency Management

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Power Outages

Power outages can occur at any time. Some black outs are short but others can stretch for hours or days and pose significant health and safety risks.

Power outage risks:

- Food spoilage of refrigerated and frozen foods.
- Carbon monoxide poisoning from unsafe use of generators and alternate heating sources.
- House fires from unsafe use of candles and alternate heating sources



This page provides basic safety tips and how to what to do before, during and after a power outage.



[Public Utilities & Power Outage Maps Links](#)


If you depend on electricity for a breathing machine or other life-sustaining technology
Read this detailed checklist by June Isaacson Kailes for advice on preparing a backup plan for electrical power:

[Emergency Power Planning for People Who Use Electricity and Battery Dependent Assistive Technology and Medical Devices \[pdf\]](#)

What to do Before a Power Outage




Basic Preparedness

- **Prepare yourself and your family** by creating an **Emergency Supply Kit** and a **Family Disaster Plan**. See NJOEM's **Basic Preparedness page** for more details.
 - **Your Kit** includes items that will help you stay self-sufficient for up to three days, if needed. 
 - **Your Plan** includes evacuation plans, a place to reunite with loved ones, and an out-of-state contact person.
- Cordless phones, answering machines or other devices will not work without electricity or a power source, plan for alternate means to power your communication devices.
 - Keep one standard landline telephone handset if that's an option.
 - If you have voice over internet phone (VOIP) through your cable or wireless carrier, you can purchase additional batteries for your phone so that it will continue to operate if power is off for more than 2 hours.
 - Have batteries and car chargers for cell phones, pagers or other devices. Most cell and mobile phones can be charged off of a running car engine with the right equipment.
- Purchase ice or freeze water-filled plastic containers to help keep food cold during a temporary power outage.
- Know where the manual release lever of your electric garage door opener is located and how to operate it. Your garage door may be heavy, so get help to lift it.
 - If you regularly use the garage as the primary means of entering your home after work, be sure to keep a key to your house with you in case the garage door will not open.
- Keep your car's fuel tank full. Gas stations rely on electricity to power their pumps.
- Keep a reserve of cash in small denominations; ATMs will not work without power.
- Turn off all computers, monitors, printers, copiers and scanners when they are not being used. If the power goes out, they will have already been safely shut down.
 - Keep files and operating systems backed up regularly. Consider buying extra batteries and a power converter if you use a laptop.
 - Get a high quality surge protector for all your computer equipment.
 - If you use the computer a lot, such as for a home business, consider purchasing and installing an uninterruptible power supply (UPS). Consult with your local computer equipment dealer about available equipment and costs.

If You Rely on Electricity for Medical Needs

- Make a backup plan for electrical power.
- [\[pdf\]>Checklist on Emergency Power Planning for People Who Use Electricity and Battery Dependent Assistive Technology and Medical Devices](#)

- **Inform officials about your needs.**
 - Register with [NJ Register Ready](#)  to alert local officials in advance about your need for additional assistance in an emergency.
 - You may also want to register with your power company, local police, and local or **County Office of Emergency Management NOW**, to make sure they have a record of your needs if there is a blackout. When you call your county, ask for the Access/Functional Needs Coordinator or the County OEM Coordinator.
- **REMEMBER:** Registration with your utility company about your medical reliance on electricity only applies to non-payment of bills. It does not have any impact on how quickly your power will be restored.
- **Battery-operated equipment:** If you use a battery-operated wheelchair, life-support system or other power-dependent equipment, obtain a charger or keep an extra battery. If available, store a lightweight manual wheelchair for backup.
- **Blind or visual disability:** If you are blind or have a visual disability, store a talking or Braille clock or large-print timepiece with extra batteries.
- **Refrigerated medication** requires special planning.
 - Standard freezer packs and ice from a local store may be adequate in some events.
 - Consider purchasing a specialized medical cooler; this may be important if you are required to evacuate.
 - Longer term outages require more planning; the possibilities include purchase of a generator to run a refrigerator, propane-fueled refrigerators or other specialized equipment

What to do During a Power Outage



Medical, mobility, communication or other needs:

- Call 911 if you are dependent on equipment that requires electricity and have an urgent need.
- Monitor the amount of time the electricity is out to determine whether to move medications requiring refrigeration into an alternate temperature controlled container.
- Individuals and caregivers can [learn more about access and functional needs planning](#).

All members of the public:

- Call your utility to notify it of the outage and learn about area repair schedules.
- Listen to your battery-powered radio or television in your emergency kit and monitor social media for updated information, and for any directions from public safety officials.

- Avoid candles because of the extreme risk of fire. Use only battery powered lights, such as flashlights, for emergency lighting.
 - Keep your refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to avoid food spoilage.
 - Avoid elevators.
 - Turn off or unplug lights and appliances to prevent a circuit overload when the power returns. Leave one light on to let you know when power has been restored.
 - Check on neighbors, especially the ill, those with electric-dependent medical needs and the elderly.
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Prevent carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Never operate a generator indoors, in your basement or in your garage.
 - Never cook indoors with charcoal.
 - Gas ovens are unsafe to heat your home.
 - Be sure you have proper ventilation if using a fuel-burning space heater, fireplace, wood or coal stove.
 - Follow manufacturers' instructions
 - Never substitute one type of fuel for another.
 - Use only safe sources of alternate heat such as a fireplace, a small well-vented wood or coal stove, or portable space heaters. Always follow manufacturers' instructions and never substitute one type of fuel for another
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Cold weather:


- Take care of your house:
 - Never use your oven as a source of heat!
 - Use only safe sources of alternate heat such as a fireplace, a small well-vented wood or coal stove, or portable space heaters. Always follow manufacturers' instructions and never substitute one type of fuel for another.
 - Close off unused rooms.
 - Turn on faucets slightly to prevent pipes from freezing. Running water will not freeze as quickly.
- Take care of yourself and your family:
 - If power may be out for a long time, plan to go to another location that has heat to keep warm.
 - Dress in warm, light layers and wear a cap for warmth.

- Eat well-balanced meals for energy.
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Hot weather:

- Watch for heat-related illnesses, especially in children who may not be able to verbalize how they feel.
 - Drink plenty of water, even if you do not feel thirsty.
 - Provide plenty of fresh, cool water for your pets.
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Food Safety

- Refrigerated foods:
 - Can keep for up to four hours during a blackout.
 - Discard any perishable refrigerated foods that have been above 40 degrees F for more than two hours.
 - Freezer items:
 - Food in full freezer will stay frozen for about two days with the door kept closed. Do not open the door unless you must.
 - Food will stay frozen about one day in a half-full freezer.
 - "When in doubt, throw it out." Discard any food with an unusual odor, color or texture
 - "[Keeping Food Safe During an Emergency](#) 
" from the United States Department of Agriculture provides detailed information about preparing your food supply for an emergency and deciding what to keep or throw away after a power outage.
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Generator Safety

- Consult with a licensed electrician before obtaining a generator.
- Learn about air quality permit requirements that may exist in your area.
- Always keep the generator outdoors, due to the extreme dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning. Never operate it inside, in the basement or the garage.
- Never connect a generator to a home's electrical system unless you have an approved power transfer switch installed by a qualified electrician!
- Always connect the equipment you want to power directly to the outlets on the generator

- [Detailed generator safety information from the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety](#) 

What to do After a Power Outage


Water Treatment

Black outs can cause contaminated water because water treatment plants do not operate without electricity. Untreated water may cause diseases such as dysentery, cholera, typhoid, and hepatitis. Contaminated water does not always smell or taste bad. All water of uncertain purity should be treated before use. Listen for guidance from your local water utility about whether your drinking water is safe and steps you can take to purify it if necessary.

- Learn more about how to [manage & treat water](#) : FEMA's Ready.gov web site
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Food & Medication Safety

Food that has not been refrigerated can cause severe health problems.

- **“When in doubt, throw it out!”**
 - Throw away any food that has been exposed to temperatures 40° F (4° C) for 2 hours or more or that has an unusual odor, color or texture.
- Contact your doctor if you’re concerned about medications having spoiled.
- Refer to the tips on this page under the "What to do During a Power Outage" section.
- Detailed information from the United States Department of Agriculture about deciding what to throw out and what to keep: [Keeping Food Safe During an Emergency](#) 

Power Outages: The Facts

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Conserve Power To Help Avoid Blackouts


The American Red Cross and the power industry recommend the following steps, to conserve power and help avoid blackouts:

- In heating season, set the furnace thermostat at 68 degrees or lower. In cooling season, set the thermostat at 78 degrees or higher.
 - Consider installing a programmable thermostat that you can set to have the furnace or air conditioning run only when you are at home.
 - Heating and cooling use the most power. Adjusting the temperatures on your thermostat is the biggest energy conservation measure you can take.
- Turn off lights and computers when not in use.
 - This is especially true about computer monitors. Avoid using a "screen saver." Simply turn the monitor off when you won't be using the computer for a while.
 - Turn the computer off completely each evening. It is no longer true that computer equipment is damaged from turning it off and on.
- Close windows when the heating or cooling system is on.
- Caulk windows and doors to keep air from leaking. Replace old windows with new, energy-efficient windows.
- Clean or replace furnace and air-conditioner filters regularly.
- When buying new appliances be sure to purchase energy-efficient models.
- Wrap the water heater with an insulation jacket, available at most building supplies retailers.
- If you have to wash clothes, wash only full loads and clean the dryer's lint trap after each use.
- When using a dishwasher, wash full loads and use the "light" cycle. If possible, use the "rinse only" cycle and turn off the "high temperature" rinse option. When the regular wash cycle is done, just open the dishwasher door to allow the dishes to air dry.
- Replace incandescent light bulbs with energy-efficient compact fluorescent lights.
- Use one large light bulb rather than several smaller ones.

Learn More



American Red Cross

- [Power Outage Checklist - English](#) [pdf]
- [Power Outage Checklist - Spanish](#) [pdf]
- [Food Safety Guidelines](#) 

- [Safe Generator Use](#) 
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FLASH, the Federal Alliance for Safe Homes

- [FLASH Card: Power Outage](#) [pdf]
 - [People with Disabilities: Power Outage](#)
 - [Power Outage: Prepare](#)
 - [Safety Tips During a Power Outage](#)
 - [Energy Conservation](#)
 - [Keeping Food Safe After a Power Outage](#)
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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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