

Energy Saver

How to Prepare Your Home for a Blackout

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Summer may best be known for lounging poolside, family vacations, and neighborhood barbeques, but there's a darker side to summer, too - electric grid blackouts and brownouts. In fact, the United States' largest blackout occurred in the dog days of August in 2003 and affected an estimated 50 million people in Canada, Ohio, Michigan, Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York.

While blackouts can occur any time of the year, high winds from hurricanes (hurricane season is just around the corner) and strong summer thunderstorms can knock out electrical lines, and high temperatures can create demand that overloads the electrical grid, causing blackouts like the one that occurred in 2003. Here are a few tips on how you can prepare your home and office to safely navigate a blackout.

- Keep a flashlight in each room of your house and in your office. Keep plenty of batteries on hand, too, or consider light sticks or a motion powered flashlight that does not need batteries.
- Keep candles and/or oil lamps on hand for light. Don't forget matches! Also, do not light candles and/or oil lamps if there is a possibility of a gas leak in your home.
- Keep the emergency number for your electric utility handy in case you need to call.
- Keep an ice chest readily available to store medications that must remain cold. Store ice packs in your freezer and ready for the ice chest.
- If you use electricity for your water, such as a well with an electric pump, have enough water available to last a couple of days. You should have at least a gallon of drinking water a day for each person in your house for drinking and cooking. Non-potable water uses, such as water for flushing toilets, can be met with water from rain catchment barrels.
- Have sustainably sourced disposable utensils and dinnerware on hand so you do not need to use water to wash dishes.
- Keep the pantry stocked with some easy-to-open, non-perishable foods that require no cooking.
- If you want to have a backup generator, make sure it is installed by a licensed electrician. Check with your local building department to see if a permit is needed. Make sure the system has an automatic breaker that disconnects the house from the

power company's regular electricity lines when it is running. This prevents electricity from leaking back into the grid and making it dangerous for utility workers. Conduct regular maintenance to make sure it is in working order.

- If you have an outdoor gas grill keep the gas tank full, or if it is an open burning grill make sure to have plenty of charcoal or wood on hand. A grill can be a handy to cook while the power is down.
- Keep a household first aid kit and a disaster preparedness backpack kit ([the American Red Cross offers this kit for sale](#)) in case something happens.
- Have a household disaster plan that you and your family can follow if something occurs.

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