The 72-Hour Blackout Plan

What to do, hour by hour, when the power is out and nobody can say when it's coming back. Print it. Put it on the fridge. Your phone may not help you later.

HOUR 0 TO 4 Set yourself up

- **Flashlights, not candles.** Candles in a dark house are a common way fires start.
- **Is it just you?** If your neighbors have lights, check your breaker panel. Then report the outage to your utility.
- **Keep the fridge and freezer shut.** A closed fridge stays cold about 4 hours. A full freezer holds about 48 hours, a half-full one about 24.
- **Unplug TVs and computers** so a surge can't hurt them. Leave one lamp switched on so you know the moment power is back.
- **Save your phone.** Dim the screen, turn on low power mode, close apps, and text instead of calling.
- **Fill water while it still runs.** Town and well pumps need power. Fill clean bottles and pots, and the bathtub for washing and flushing.

HOUR 4 TO 24 Food, heat and phones

- **The fridge is done after about 4 hours.** Meat, poultry, seafood, milk, eggs and leftovers that sat above 40°F for 2 hours go in the trash. No thermometer? Toss them after 4 hours without power. Never taste food to test it.
- **Move what's left to a cooler** with ice or frozen gel packs.
- **Never heat the house with the oven or stove.** Grills and camp stoves go outside, at least 20 feet from windows, doors and vents. Carbon monoxide has no color or smell and can kill people while they sleep.
- **Cold?** Pick one room and close off the rest. Stuff towels into the gaps under doors. Wear loose layers and a hat, and share blankets. **Hot?** Block the sun, put cool water on your skin, and find out from a battery radio where cooling centers are open.
- **Calls won't go through? Text.** The FCC says texts can wait in line and go out when the network has room.
- **Can't reach anyone nearby?** Call someone far away. Long-distance calls can work when local ones don't.
- **Write the important numbers on paper** in case your phone dies.

HOUR 24 TO 48 Find the water you already have

- **Your water heater holds about 40 gallons** (FEMA), if it was strapped and isn't damaged. Turn off its power or gas and let it cool. If city water may be unsafe, close the cold-water valve on the pipe going in. Open a hot tap somewhere in the house to let air in, then drain from the valve at the bottom. Refill the tank completely before you turn it back on.

- **Your pipes still hold water.** Open a tap on the highest floor to let air in, and water may run from the lowest tap in the home.
- **The toilet tank, never the bowl,** is usable if the water is clear and has no colored cleaner in it. Treat it before drinking.
- **Ice made from safe water** is safe once melted, and the liquid in canned fruit and vegetables counts toward your fluids.

Make water safe to drink. Bring it to a rolling boil for 1 minute (3 minutes above 6,500 feet). Or use plain, unscented bleach: **6% bleach, 8 drops per gallon. 8.25% bleach, 6 drops per gallon.** 2 drops per quart either way. Double it if the water is cloudy, colored or very cold. Stir and wait 30 minutes. It should smell slightly of chlorine; if not, repeat the dose and wait 15 more minutes.

- **Freezer food with ice crystals,** or at 40°F or colder, can still be cooked or refrozen. Eat that next.
- **Toilets.** Water off but the sewer works? Flush by pouring in water you can't drink. Sewer broken? Don't flush at all, because flushing can push sewage back into homes. Line the bowl with two heavy bags and cover each use with cat litter, sawdust or shredded paper.

HOUR 48 TO 72 Money, people and when to leave

- **Cards, banks and ATMs may stop working.** Spend cash on water, food, fuel and medicine first. Small bills are easiest when no one can make change.
- **Watch for scams.** No real agency charges you to apply for aid. Never pay by gift card, wire, payment app or crypto. Anyone at your door claiming to be from a utility or agency should show ID.
- **Check on older neighbors** and anyone living alone. They are most at risk in heat and cold.
- **Get news from a radio.** AM, FM and NOAA Weather Radio need no phone network.
- **Know the order power comes back.** The Department of Energy describes it: power plants, big transmission lines, substations, then hospitals, water systems, police and fire, then the lines that serve the most people. Single homes come last.
- **When it comes back,** wait a few minutes, then plug things in one at a time, starting with the fridge.
- **Hour 72:** FEMA treats a wide outage of more than 72 hours as a long-term outage. If you can't stay warm or cool, you're running out of water, or someone needs power for medical care, leave early, in daylight. Leave a note at home and text your out-of-area contact.

Have every step with you when there's no signal. Emergency Mode is an app that works with no internet: step-by-step guides, your family's meeting plan, and help read out loud. Coming soon to the App Store. Get it first at **emergencymode.app**.

Based on public guidance from FEMA, CDC, USDA, EPA, FCC and the Department of Energy. Emergency Mode is not affiliated with any government agency. This guide is not a substitute for professional care. In an emergency, call 911.