



How to prepare your home and family for power outages

Allison Hillaker
Pioneer State Mutual Insurance Company

Whether it's ice, heavy snow, strong winds or substantial rains, power lines can often be brought down by nature's force, leaving homes in the area without electricity. Power outages may not only cause dangerous situations for your family due to harsh weather temperatures, but can also wreak havoc on one's home. Here are some ways to prepare your family and your house for power outages.

Choosing the right Generator

Power outages most often occur during the harshest of weather. In the summer families often face high temperatures with smoldering humidity; in the winter they face the freezing cold. So, having a whole-house generator can help regulate your home's temperature for your comfort and safety. Further, though, it can also help protect your home. In the winter, when the power goes out, a home's pipes can freeze. This could lead to bursting pipes as the water inside expands due to the ice. Having a whole-house generator can keep the pipes warm enough, and can keep your water running so you can drip water (which [The Weather Channel](#) reports can assist in preventing freezing and/or bursting pipes).

There are many generator options available. Online retailer [Amazon.com](#) offers a buying guide on these devices. As they indicate, there are three types of generators: standby, portable and inverter. Standby generators connect directly to your home; most will automatically switch on when it notices the power shuts off. The advantage to this product is that the homeowner does not need to be home in order for it activate. However, these are the most expensive option on the market currently. Portable generators are more moderately priced. These units are typically used to power individual appliances. They run on gasoline, meaning they must be monitored at all times and refilled often. Finally, the most affordable, but least overall effective, option is the inverter generator. These are typically used for only small appliances.

Sump Pump Backup

It is important for homes with a basement to have the proper sump pump backup. Typically, sump pumps work off of electricity. So, when the power goes out, basements are often flooded when the sump pump quits working. [Lowes Home Improvement Stores](#) offers a detailed guide on their website to choose and install a backup sump pump. A popular option would be to connect a backup that runs off battery power. However, there are also options available such as pumps that work off of the city's water pressure, for those who have city water. Having a backup can prevent major water damage, particularly for homes with finished basements.

Trimming your Trees

Keeping your trees properly trimmed not only adds curb appeal to your home, but can also prevent a disaster. Strong winds, ice and/or snow can cause trees and large branches to fall onto houses and cars. This is incredibly dangerous. So, keeping your trees trimmed during the spring, summer and fall months can prevent such a disaster year-round. [OSHA](#) reminds homeowners that it is important to trim trees only in good weather conditions, to follow ALL safety instructions on tools, and to remain alert while trimming any tree branches. For tree branches that are heavy, high off the ground or in a hard-to-reach position, it is STRONGLY recommended to hire a professional tree trimming service to remove the tree and/or branches.

[Consumers Energy](#) reports that trees are responsible for approximately 30% of power outages. HOWEVER, if a tree on your property is near a power line DO NOT CUT IT DOWN YOURSELF. It is very important that you contact your energy provider to remove a tree near a power line.

Emergency Kit

For your family's safety, it is best to keep an emergency kit in your home at all times in case of a power outage. [FEMA](#) offers a tool on their website to help families build this kit. As a part of this, they recommend having food, water and supplies to last for 72 hours. It is also recommended to include blankets, battery operated flashlights/lanterns and a battery operated [NOAA](#) weather radio, so you can stay informed in emergency situations.

Know how & when to leave your home

For your safety, it may be best to leave your home during a power outage. Please note that it is important to pay attention to the weather service so you do not travel into a dangerous situation. However, if you do need to leave, it is vital to have the preparations in place beforehand.

The first step is having an Emergency Evacuation Plan. This would include telling your family where to meet, what items to bring with you, and how you will exit your home together. Be sure to inform every member of your family of this plan, so it can be flawlessly executed should a disaster occur.

Next, in the scenario of a power outage, it is important to shut off and unplug appliances and electrical devices. When power returns, it occasionally can cause a surge, frying appliances and even causing a fire. So, it is important to ensure items that use electricity are safely disconnected before you leave.

Finally, burglaries can occur when a home appears abandoned. Therefore, it is important to lock your doors, ensure all windows are closed, and to check up on the home often. It may be a good idea to leave a car parked in the driveway. If your evacuation is during the winter, it is also important to keep the driveway, sidewalks and pathways shoveled. This can add to the appearance that someone is home as well as prevent any slips and falls that could occur on your property while you are away (i.e. mail/newspaper delivery persons).

It is important to prepare your home before a power outage occurs. Having these disaster readiness tools in place now can offer you and your family peace of mind if the electricity does go out. With each of these steps, electrical items can be dangerous; so it is very important to follow all safety procedures carefully. Doing so can keep you, your family and your home safer.

