

The First Hour of a Power Outage

What to do in the first hour after the power goes out, before you know whether it will last one hour or two days.

The first job is not to solve the outage. The first job is to keep the next hour safe and preserve your options if it lasts.

First move: check people before things. If anyone depends on powered medical equipment, refrigerated medicine, heat, cooling, an elevator, or a powered mobility device, check them first.

IN THE FIRST HOUR, DO THIS IN ORDER

- Put every phone on low-power mode. Send one short update to whoever needs to know.
- Report or check the outage once. Then stop refreshing.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed. Open once only if you must.
- Watch heat, cold, and air. Close curtains or doors as needed. Keep elders, babies, and medically fragile people in the most stable room.
- If you have a private well, fill a few clean containers while pressure remains.
- Unplug sensitive electronics. Leave one light on so you'll know when power is back.
- Check one nearby person who may not ask for help.

IS THIS GOING TO BE A LONG ONE?

Treat it as more than a nuisance if any of these are true:

- The utility gives no restoration time, or keeps pushing it back.
- The outage covers a wide area.
- Weather is still damaging lines, roads, or trees.
- The house is becoming too hot or too cold.
- Someone depends on electricity for medical equipment, mobility, refrigerated medicine, or safe temperature.
- Water, cell service, roads, stores, or elevators are also affected.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Do not keep opening the refrigerator or freezer.
- Do not taste food to see whether it is safe.
- Do not burn charcoal, propane, gasoline, or any fuel inside the house, garage, basement, or near openings.
- Do not use a gas stove or oven to heat the home.
- Do not sit in a running car in a garage or enclosed space.
- Do not drive just to look around.
- Do not spend the whole first hour refreshing the outage map.

CALL FOR HELP OR LEAVE IF

- A powered medical device, oxygen line, mobility device, or refrigerated medication is at risk.
- The home is becoming dangerously hot or cold.
- You smell gas, see sparks, see a downed power line, or suspect electrical damage.
- A carbon monoxide alarm sounds, or someone may be exposed to carbon monoxide.
- You cannot safely keep a child, elder, disabled person, or medically fragile person where they are.

Checked against guidance from the CDC, FoodSafety.gov, FDA, the U.S. Department of Energy, the National Weather Service, and the American Red Cross. Source notes at cairnsociety.org/first-hour-power-outage/sources.

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