

Environmental Health Services Division

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What do I do if the power goes out?

What is a power outage?

A "power outage" refers to those times when regular electric service has been interrupted by damage to power lines or power stations due to storms, floods, land slides, earthquakes, and so on. During a disaster situation, electric power can be out for days or weeks. It is important to plan ahead for the possibility of losing electric power. Know where the flashlight and other emergency supplies are kept.

What should I do if the power goes out?

- Check the fuse box to see if there is a blown fuse or a tripped circuit breaker. Sometimes the power outage will be limited to your own home.
- If you determine that a fuse or circuit breaker needs to be replaced, turn off all large appliances or unplug them before replacing a fuse or a breaker to avoid damage to the electrical system.
- Check your neighborhood to see if others are without power.
- Call to report the power outage. Call only once to keep the line open for other customers.
 - **For residents of the Seattle area, call Seattle City Light Power Outage Hotline at 206-684-7400.**
 - **For other King County residents, call Puget Sound Energy Repairs and Power Outage at 1-800-321-4123.**
- In a severe emergency or disaster, expect electric power to be out for several days. In such an event, consider relocating to a shelter or to a friend's home where heat and power are available.
- **WARNING:** Never use charcoal, gas, or propane heaters indoors. Doing so can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning. These can also increase the risk of fire.

What should you do when you see damaged or downed power lines in your neighborhood?

- Don't get near any fallen or sagging power line.
- Call the utility company about the line.

What should you do to protect your electric appliances from electrical power surges when the power returns?

- Sometimes when power is restored, power levels can vary considerably. This variation can damage electrical appliances.
- Turn off the lights and electrical appliances except for the refrigerator and the freezer.
- After you have turned off the lights, go back and turn on one single lamp so that you will know when the power is working again.
- Wait at least 15 minutes before turning on the remaining appliances after the power has been restored.

What about people who are using life support equipment at home?

- People who depend on electrical equipment to treat a health problem should have a plan in advance of a power outage.
- In some cases, this may mean purchasing a back-up power supply such as a generator or going to a health care facility that has back-up power.
- People who use life support equipment should register with the local utility. When they do this, the utility will make them a top priority for power supply repair and restoration.

How should I use a power generator?

- For your safety, always follow the manufacturer's instruction on the use of power generators.
- Since most generators are powered by gasoline and can generate carbon monoxide gas, run them outdoors where the fumes will not cause illness.
- Power generators should never be plugged into your home's main electrical panel as this may result in serious injury or death to utility personnel working to restore power.
- Instead, plug the generator directly into the appliance you wish to use during the outage.

How long will the food in my refrigerator and freezer remain cold enough to prevent food borne illness?

- It is important to keep freezer and refrigerator doors closed to prevent the loss of cold air.
- A fully loaded refrigerator may keep food fresh for about six hours.
- A fully loaded freezer may keep food frozen for up to two days.
- If any food in the refrigerator or freezer is warmer than 41 °F, throw it out.