

Make contact after an emergency

Disaster events have the potential to cripple communication systems quite easily, making it challenging to get news to others of current conditions and wellness status.

Having a mobile phone is perhaps one of the best safety measures in the event of a disaster. While voice calls can tie up bandwidth and voice networks, data-based services like text messages and emails are less likely to experience network congestion and will go through more easily, advises the Federal Communications Commission.

As soon as possible, reach out to someone to provide a status update. This person, in turn, can relay information to others.

Another idea is to use social media to post a status report. This will help get the word out to the greatest number of people in the least amount of time, provided a few minutes of network connectivity are available.

A third resource is contacting loved ones through a local American Red Cross chapter. The agency can help family members reconnect whether separation was caused by an emergency at home or overseas. Individuals also can list themselves on the Red Cross' "Safe and Well" website. Status can be updated at any time, and others can access the information to check in on loved ones who have been out of contact.

Safely handle a prolonged power outage

Accidents and storms can disrupt the electricity that powers everything in homes and businesses. A short-term loss of power can be a nuisance, but extended power outages can cause damage and may even be dangerous.

Widespread power outages are often anticipated during or after severe storms, which can disable entire power grids. Because damaged power lines and infrastructure must be carefully assessed after severe storms, it may take anywhere from hours to several days before power is fully restored.

The Food and Drug Administration says that food spoilage is one of the hazards of long-term power outages. If a storm is imminent, you can be proactive by freezing the contents of the refrigerator when possible so that items can stay at safe temperatures longer, advises the FDA. Food

can remain safe for up to two hours at refrigerator temperature before it starts to spoil. Grouping food together in the freezer also can help it stay colder longer. Having extra ice on hand or freezing containers of water also can provide a chilling effect, as well as serve as a water supply if faucet water is unavailable — which can be a concern for those with well-pumped water.

Your barbecue can turn out to be your best friend during power outages. Many stoves, even gas ones, will not light because of electric ignitions. A gas camping stove or barbecue can serve as the primary place to cook food until power is restored. Always have a secondary propane tank on hand.

Keep plenty of bottled water on hand, especially if your water supply is well-fed and requires an electric pump to activate flow.

Stock up on blankets and warm clothing. Power outages during the winter can be especially challenging because of the lack of heat in a home. Family members can huddle together in small rooms to conserve heat. People with wood-burning stoves can use them to keep warm.

If you have a generator, run it safely. The Consumer Product Safety Commission says generators should be operated as far away from the house as possible to avoid deadly carbon monoxide fumes. Also, use appropriately-gauged, outdoor-rated extension cords to power up generators.

It is also important to stay put and avoid the road after a storm that causes a power outage. Wires may be down, traffic lights may not work and dangerous debris may be littering the roads. Hunkering down is the best approach until power is restored.



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