

## Disaster preparedness

Your cooperative spends quite a bit of time developing and refining its disaster plan. It is a document that spells out what we will do in the event of a major disaster of any kind. When weather that has the potential of an Irene or Halloween snow storm is forecast, that plan is implemented.

Every one of our members should have their own disaster plan. Regardless of how hard we work and prepare, no electric utility can guarantee uninterrupted power or prioritization when it comes to individual service restoration. If you require an uninterrupted flow of electricity, you need to make arrangements to secure it when a potential emergency looms. The most common options here are generators, battery backup units or going to an area that will be out of the path of the storm.

Aside from this, here are other steps to take to protect you, your family and your property.

1. Money and gasoline – In a widespread outage, banks, ATMs and gas stations will also be out of power. Fill up your vehicle(s) and get some money so you can pay cash for any necessities while the power is being restored.

2. Food and water – Disaster experts suggest a minimum of 2 – 3 days of both non-perishable food and water. Start now saving a few plastic jugs for water. Fill them up when a storm is imminent. You can also freeze some and leave them in your refrigerator and freezer for extra cooling power. Plus, as they thaw you get more water. Fill up your bath tub with water you can use for flushing and washing.

Consider food with a long shelf life or canned goods. In the case of the former, freeze dried camping meals are one option as they stay good for a long time. Other sources offer food with 25 – 50 years shelf life.

You might also fill up your propane tank if you have an outdoor grill so you can do some cooking. Got a camp stove? Be sure to have fuel for that. DO NOT use either inside your home. Even using them in the garage is dangerous as carbon monoxide can build up and leak inside.

3. Perishable food management – In the winter, refrigerated and frozen food will stay safe for a longer time due to lower temperatures. Limit the number of times you open these appliances so you can keep in the cold as long as possible. If we have snow or the temperatures are consistently below freezing, put these items outside in a secure place.

4. Communications – Charge up your cell phone(s). Write down all important phone (like our outage number: 877.504.6463) and prescription numbers. Put them where you can find them easily. Sign up for one or more of our outage update services. These include our e-mail blasts and Twitter updates that can be picked up on a smart phone. We also offer a new text service to report outages and provide restoration notices. You can also ask a family member or friend with power to check our website and give you updates that way.

5. Prescriptions – If you have prescriptions that your health depends upon, get them refilled before the storm hits. Like banks and gas stations, most pharmacies will be out of power too.

6. Batteries and matches – Light and entertainment will be scarce in an outage so be sure you have plenty of batteries for flashlights and radios. Also have matches handy for candles or cooking.

7. Generators – If you have a generator, test it to be sure it will operate properly and for portables, have gas and oil on hand. Safety is key when operating a portable generator. Follow the steps in your owner’s manual for proper connection and operation practices to be sure you are not putting your property or others at risk. If you have been considering a generator, buy it before the storm hits. In the aftermath of a major storm, prices jump and availability plummets.

8. Property and personal safety – All downed wires have the potential to be live. Stay well clear of any you see. If you must leave your home, prepare it properly. Turn off the main breaker in your electric panel. Shut off your water at the main cut-off. Open your faucets slightly so the water will drain out and clear most of your pipes to prevent freeze damage.

9. Reporting an outage – If you lose power, let us know by calling our outage number of 877.504.6463. We provide updates over the radio, on our web site, through our e-mail blast and Twitter plus via text messages. Because of the way our system works, we can restore large circuits that still have individual home services out due to damage. If you are away from your home and receive a notice that your area has been restored, check to be sure your home is back on before you return.

For those properly prepared, an extended power outage can be tolerated. If participating in one or more of our electronic update options isn’t a part of your plan now, please consider adding them. All can be accessed from our website. And we can talk to you about a whole house generator or a GenerLink device that simplifies using portable models.

We appreciate the patience and words of encouragement from our members during outages. Our goal is to minimize the length of any outage and such treatment by our members makes a very difficult job a little bit easier.