GRID DOWN PREP

THE EMERGENCY PLAYBOOK

What to do, step by step, in the 10 emergencies most likely to hit your home



THE FIRST HOUR · THE FIRST NIGHT · THE FIRST WEEK

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PLAYBOOK ONE

BLACKOUT

The most common emergency in America, and the one every other emergency can turn into. Most last hours. The long ones are where planning pays off.

WHEN THE POWER GOES OUT

On a hot afternoon in August 2003, the lights went out across eight states and part of Canada in a matter of minutes.

WHAT HAPPENED IN 2003

The blackout of August 14, 2003, started with a problem on one utility's grid in northern Ohio and cascaded until about 50 million people in the Northeast, the Midwest and Ontario had no power. In some places it took up to four days to bring it back. In New York City, thousands of people walked home across the bridges that night, and crowds gathered around battery radios to find out what was going on.

Sources: U.S.-Canada Power System Outage Task Force, Final Report (2004); U.S. Department of Energy.

HOW A BLACKOUT UNFOLDS

1. **Hour 1.** Lights, internet, garage doors and traffic signals stop. Cell service usually works, but gets crowded.
2. **Hours 2 to 4.** The fridge starts to warm up. Card machines are down where stores have no backup. Gas stations can't pump.
3. **Night 1.** The house is dark and, depending on the season, getting cold or hot. This is when candles and generators start causing fires and poisonings.
4. **Days 2 to 4.** Water pressure can drop in places that rely on electric pumps. Phone batteries run out. Most outages are over by now.

BEFORE THE BLACKOUT

Everything you do before the lights go out is cheaper and easier than anything you can do after.

1. **Put lights where you can find them in the dark.** One flashlight or headlamp by every bed, one lantern in the kitchen.
2. **Keep phones and a power bank charged.** Top up the power bank every few months.
3. **Store three days of water and no-cook food.** One gallon per person per day.
4. **Learn to open the garage door by hand.** Find the red release cord and try it once.
5. **Sign up for your utility's outage alerts.** Save the outage number on paper too.
6. **If anyone depends on powered medical equipment,** call the utility and ask about its medical program.

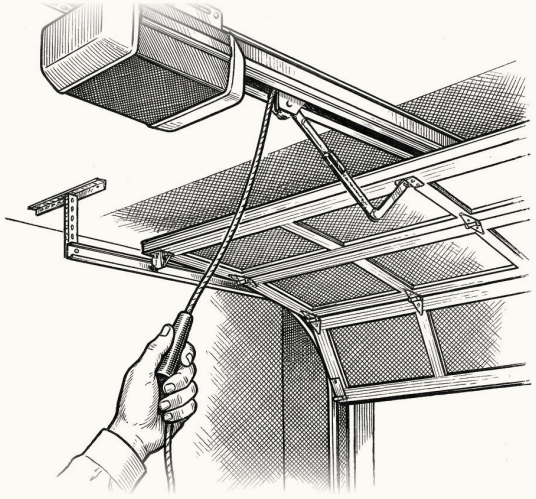


FIG. 1-A The manual release hangs from the opener rail. Pull it once now, in daylight, so you know how it feels.

BUDGET PLAN · TWO PEOPLE

THE $75 BLACKOUT PLAN $75

Light, power, news, water and food for the first 72 hours, in one trip.

ITEM	QTY	PRICE
LED lantern	1	**$10.28**
AA batteries, 24-pack	1	**$9.97**
Power bank, 10,000 mAh	1	**$12.88**
Hand-crank emergency radio	1	**$26.99**
Purified drinking water, 24-pack	2	**$7.94**
Saltine crackers, 16 oz	1	**$1.88**
Peanut butter, 40 oz	1	**$4.18**
TOTAL, before tax		**$74.12**

Prices checked at Walmart.com on November 17, 2026. Prices vary by store and change over time.

DURING THE BLACKOUT

The first hour decides how the next three days go.

THE FIRST HOUR

1. **Get light from a flashlight or lantern, not a candle.**
2. **Check whether it's only your house.** Look at the neighbors' windows and the streetlights. If they're lit, check your breaker panel. Then report the outage to the utility.
3. **Keep the fridge and freezer closed.** A closed fridge keeps food safe for about four hours, a full freezer for about two days.
4. **Unplug sensitive electronics.** Leave one lamp switched on so you know when the power is back.
5. **Turn on the radio.** Find out how big the outage is and how long it might last.

THE FIRST NIGHT

Move everyone into one room. In winter, make it a warm room: small, interior, doors closed, towels at the gaps. In summer, the lowest and shadiest room in the house. Check on neighbors who live alone, especially older ones.

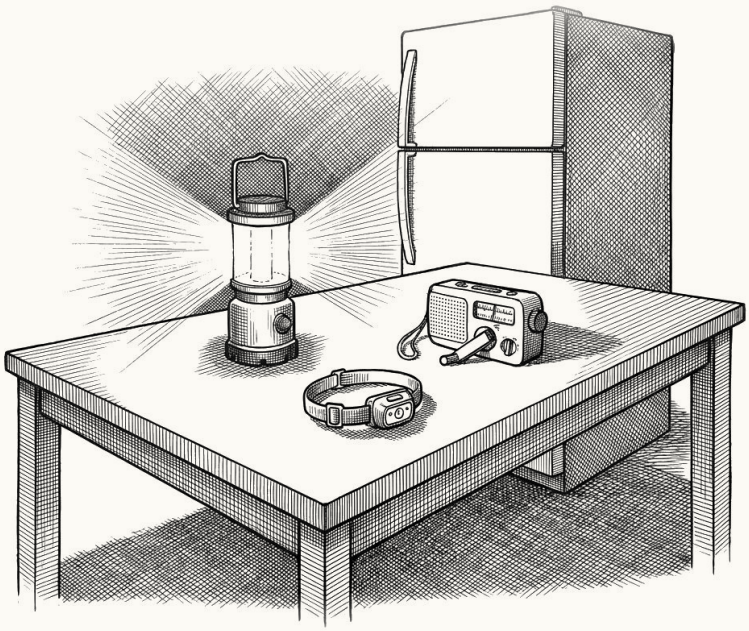


FIG. 1-B One lantern on the table lights the room you'll live in. Headlamps keep your hands free.

THE FIRST WEEK

Eat from the fridge first, then the freezer, then the pantry. Keep any generator outside, more than 20 feet from windows, doors and vents, and never run a car in an attached garage. If the house gets dangerously cold or hot, it's time to think about leaving.

CAREFUL

Never use a grill, camp stove or generator indoors, in a garage or near a window. Carbon monoxide has no smell. A battery-powered CO alarm is the only warning you'll get.

MISTAKES THAT COST LIVES: BLACKOUT

Five errors that show up again and again in this emergency.

1. **Lighting the house with candles.** Candles are a leading cause of home fires during outages. Use flashlights and lanterns, and keep candles for the birthday cake.
2. **Running the generator in the garage, even with the door open.** Carbon monoxide builds up fast in a garage and seeps into the house. Generators go outside, more than 20 feet from windows, doors and vents.
3. **Opening the freezer to check on it.** Every opening lets the cold out. A full freezer holds for about two days if you leave it closed.
4. **Heating the house with the gas oven or a grill.** Neither is made to heat a room, and both can fill it with carbon monoxide. Use the warm room plan in Playbook 5.
5. **Assuming it will be over in an hour.** Charge the phones, fill a few pots with water and move into one room while you still have daylight. If the power comes back, you've lost nothing.

STAY OR LEAVE: BLACKOUT

Most blackouts are best ridden out at home. A few aren't.

LEAVE, OR GO TO A WARMING OR COOLING CENTER, IF:

- The inside temperature drops below about 55°F, or climbs above about 90°F, and won't come back
- Someone depends on powered medical equipment and the battery is running low
- Anyone shows signs of hypothermia, heat illness or carbon monoxide poisoning
- Local officials tell you to

STAY IF:

- The house holds a safe temperature, you have water, food and light, and the roads are dangerous

CHECKLIST 2 OF 29

BLACKOUT: BEFORE

Do these while the lights are on.

- [ ] A flashlight or headlamp by every bed
- [ ] A lantern in the kitchen, with spare batteries
- [ ] Phones and a power bank charged
- [ ] Three days of water and no-cook food
- [ ] Garage door manual release tried once
- [ ] Utility outage number saved on paper
- [ ] Battery CO alarm near the bedrooms

All ticked? This one is done.

CHECKLIST 3 OF 29

BLACKOUT: FIRST-HOUR CARD

Tape this inside a kitchen cabinet. Follow it top to bottom.

- [ ] Light from a flashlight, not a candle
- [ ] Check the neighbors and the breaker panel
- [ ] Report the outage to the utility
- [ ] Fridge and freezer closed
- [ ] Sensitive electronics unplugged, one lamp left on
- [ ] Radio on: how big, how long?
- [ ] Everyone into one room before dark

All ticked? This one is done.