

Self-Reliance in a Power Outage

People do not usually think of a power outage in the same light as an earthquake. However, when the power is out for a long period of time, citizen requests for fire, police, medical and other public services will begin to mount. At some point, the increased demand for services could result in delayed response times. For this reason, every citizen should learn to be self-reliant in an emergency. And even though power outages may only last a few hours, individuals and organizations should be prepared to be without assistance for 72 hours or longer.

To help people prepare for an emergency, the Unified San Diego County Emergency Services Organization, County Office of Disaster Preparedness, State of California, American Red Cross, Federal Emergency Management Agency and San Diego Gas and Electric Company have provided information on what to do during a power outage or other emergency.

- **Check Circuit Breakers.** If your power goes out, check your home's circuit breakers or fuses first. Your power could be out because a circuit has tripped or a fuse has blown.
- **Report Electrical Outages.** See if the lights in your neighborhood are off. Contact the local electric utility to report an outage.
- **Power Lines.** If you can see any power lines on the ground, stay at least 10 feet away from them as electricity might still be flowing through the lines.
- **Sensitive Appliances.** Protect appliances from possible power surges when electricity is restored. Unplug appliances and computers, if possible, and turn off non-essential lights.
- **Keep Food Cold.** Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to help prevent food spoilage. Refrigerated foods should remain safe to eat for four hours. Food in a closed freezer can stay frozen for up to two days. If in doubt, throw it out.
- **Dry Ice.** Add dry or block ice to the freezer to help keep food frozen. Never add dry ice with your bare hands or place directly on top of food.
- **Water.** Discontinue non-essential water usage. Do not drink cloudy or dirty water. Don't be alarmed if chlorine level is higher than normal. Notify water officials of low or no water pressure.
- **Stay Cool.** During hot days, stay cool indoors and drink plenty of fluids.
- **Check on Neighbors.** Check on elderly or medically dependent neighbors.
- **Life-Support Equipment.** If someone in your household uses life-support equipment, make arrangements for a back-up power supply.
- **Generators.** Establish independent, short-term power supplies such as generators or battery-operated devices. If you own a generator, never plug it into any electric outlet in your home. Instead, plug appliances directly into the generator.
- **Monitor Radio and Television.** Monitor battery-operated radio or television for current information on the outage.
- **Telephones.** A telephone that does not depend on electricity. Cordless phones will not function during an outage.
- **Garage Doors.** Know how to manually release and open any electric doors, like garage doors.

- **Security Gates.** Find out the necessary steps to open and close security gates.
- **House Numbers.** Ensure house numbers are readily visible from the street by emergency responders.
- **Anticipate Traffic Delays.** Intersections should be treated as four-way stops when traffic lights are out. Anticipate long traffic delays in areas where the power is out.

HELPING CHILDREN COPE

Children depend on daily routines: They wake up, eat breakfast, go to school and play with friends. At night, they are accustomed to having light and entertainment available at the flick of a switch. When a power outage interrupts this routine, children may become anxious and look to you and other adults for help. How *you* react to a power outage gives children clues on how to act. If you react with alarm, a child may become more scared. When talking with children about an outage, be sure to present a realistic picture about what has happened and the expected outcome. Make sure your response is both honest and manageable.

- **Explain the Situation.** Your calming words and actions can provide reassurance and may have a lasting impact.
- **Listen.** Concentrate on your child's emotional needs by asking the child what's uppermost in his or her mind. Encourage children to describe what they're feeling. Listen to what they say. If possible, include the entire family in the discussion.
- **School Plans.** Ask your children's teachers and caregivers about power outage emergency plans for schools and day-care centers.
- **Emergency Numbers.** Post emergency telephone numbers near telephones and teach your children how and when to call for help.
- **Entertainment.** Although children need you in case of an emergency, they need you for play, too. Encourage them to participate in games, arts and crafts, and reading. Keep flashlights, notebooks, magazines, colored paper, color markers and tape readily available.
- **Returning to Normal.** Have children participate in activities that will help them feel that their life will return to "normal" when the power is restored.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

If you are disabled, being prepared can reduce the fear, panic and inconvenience that surround an emergency.

- **Backup Power Supplies.** Learn what you can do in a power outage. Know how to start or connect a backup power supply for essential medical equipment.
- **Flashlights.** Keep a flashlight handy to signal whereabouts to other people and for illumination to aid in communication.
- **Self-Help Network.** Create a self-help network of relatives, friends or co-workers. Discuss your disability and ask for their assistance in an emergency. Arrange for someone to check on you in an emergency.
- **Teach Others How To Help You.** Teach others how to operate necessary equipment. Give a key to a neighbor or friend who may be able to assist you. Make sure they know where you keep emergency supplies.
- **Hearing Impaired.** Remind friends that you cannot hear warnings or emergency instructions. Ask them to be your source of emergency information as it comes over their radio.

- **Medical Alert Systems**. Consider getting a medical alert system that will allow you to call if you are immobilized in an emergency. If you have a severe speech, language or hearing disability, learn how to use TDD telephone services. Wear medical alert tags or bracelets to identify your disability.
- **Wheelchair**. If you use a wheelchair, show friends how to operate your wheelchair so they can move you, if necessary. Make sure your friends know the size of your wheelchair in case it has to be transported.
- **Personal Attendants**. If you use a personal care attendant obtained from an agency, check to see if the agency has special provisions for emergencies such as power outages.
- **Life-Sustaining Equipment**. Know the location and availability of more than one facility if you are dependent on a dialysis machine or other life-sustaining equipment or treatment.
- **Pets**. If you have a hearing ear dog, be aware that the dog may become confused or disoriented in an emergency. Store extra food, water and supplies for your dog.
- **Special Assistance Programs**. Ask about special assistance that may be available to you in an emergency. Many communities ask people with a disability to register so needed help can be provided quickly in an emergency.

EMERGENCY SUPPLY KIT

Maintaining an emergency supply kit is a good idea for any emergency. Consider having the following supplies handy for any situation:

- Battery-powered radio, flashlights and batteries
- Extra set of car keys
- Water
- Food (canned, no-cook, packaged snacks)
- Manual can opener
- Wind-up or battery-operated clock
- Cash and credit cards
- Change of clothing, rain gear and sturdy shoes
- Blankets or sleeping bags
- If you have a baby, include extra diapers and other infant-care items
- First-aid kit
- Essential medicines and prescription information
- Names, addresses and telephone numbers of doctors and pharmacist
- Extra pair of glasses, hearing aid batteries, extra wheelchair batteries, oxygen, medication, catheters, food for guide or service dogs, or other special equipment you might need
- A list of the style and serial numbers of medical devices, such as pacemakers

For further information on preparing for an emergency, please contact:

*San Diego County Office of Disaster Preparedness
858.565.3490*