FORTUNE FAVORS THE PREPARED · POWER ONE-PAGER

When the Lights Go Out

An outage is a nuisance for an hour and a problem by day three.

1. What do we do in the first hour?
2. When does the food go bad?
3. How do we stay warm and safe?
4. What backup power fits us?
5. What must keep running?

1 The outage timeline · note the time the power went off: the food clock starts then

First hour

- ☐ Just us? Check breakers and neighbors.
- ☐ **Report it** to the utility. Don't assume others did.
- ☐ Fridge and freezer **shut**. Flashlights, not candles.
- ☐ Unplug electronics: power can return with a surge.
- ☐ Downed line? Assume it's live. Stay back, call it in.

First day

- ☐ After 4 hours, fridge food into coolers with ice.
- ☐ Fill water jugs if on a well or pressure drops.
- ☐ Save batteries: phones on low power mode.
- ☐ Car charging: **outdoors only**, never in a garage.
- ☐ Check on neighbors and anyone on medical gear.

Day 2 and beyond

- ☐ Make food calls by thermometer (section 2).
- ☐ Too hot or cold? Go to a warming/cooling center.
- ☐ Winter: one warm room. No heat? Drain the pipes.
- ☐ Generator in shifts: fridge, freezer, sump.
- ☐ Fridge meds warm 1+ day? Ask a pharmacist.

2 Food: the 4 / 24 / 48 rule · USDA

4 h	24 h	48 h
Fridge, door closed	Half-full freezer, closed	Full freezer, closed

- Safe = fridge **40°F or below**, freezer 0°F. Keep a thermometer in each.
- Toss perishables (meat, milk, eggs, leftovers) above 40°F for **2 hours or more**.
- Frozen food with ice crystals, or at 40°F or below, can be refrozen.
- Never taste to test. **When in doubt, throw it out.**

3 Water · no power can mean no water

- **On a well?** No power, no pump. Most need 240 V and a big start surge: size a generator for it, or plan a DC or hand pump.
- **City water?** Pressure can drop if pumps lose power. Fill jugs, and the tub for flushing, early.
- **Boil order:** rolling boil 1 minute (3 above 6,500 ft) per CDC, or use stored water. Boiling won't remove chemicals.
- Store at least **1 gallon per person per day**. More on the Water page.

4 Light and heat, safely

- **Light:** flashlights, headlamps, battery lanterns. Avoid candles; never leave one burning.
- **CO alarms** (battery or battery-backup) near sleeping areas, every level. Headache, dizziness, nausea: get out, call 9-1-1.
- **Generators** outside only, **20+ ft** from windows, doors, vents (CDC). Never in a house or garage, even with the door open.
- **Never indoors:** grills, charcoal, camp stoves, or a gas oven for heat.
- **Never** plug a generator into a wall outlet (backfeed kills line crews). Use cords or a transfer switch.

5 Medical devices and medicines

- **Register with your utility's medical program** where offered. It gives notice, **not** first restoration.
- Ask your supplier: battery life, a DC (car) cord, and the plan for a multi-day outage.
- Ask how long fridge medicines (e.g. insulin) keep warm. Keep a cooler ready.
- CPAP: the heated humidifier can double the draw; ask about running it dry.
- Know the nearest place with power: library, fire station, shelter.

6 The backup-power ladder · start at the bottom rung; most homes need two or three

Rung	Runs	Roughly how long	Cost	Safety and tips
1. Power banks	Phones, radios, headlamps	2–6 phone charges each	$20–80	Keep charged. One per person.
2. UPS	Router, modem, a radio; PC shutdown	Minutes to a few hours	$60–250	Not for fridges. Battery 3–5 yrs. See UPS.
3. Power station	CPAP, lights, phones, fridge a while	Hours to 1–2 nights	$200–2,000	300–2,000+ Wh. No fumes: OK indoors.
4. Inverter generator	Fridge, freezer, sump, lights, in turns	6–12 h a tank, light load	$500–2,500	Outside, 20+ ft. Cool before refueling. Rotate fuel.
5. Standby generator	Most of the house, well, furnace	Days, on gas or propane	$7–20k+	Licensed install, transfer switch, permit.

7 What we need to keep running

Device	Running W	Surge W	Ours (W)	Hours/day
Fridge	150–800	1,200–2,200		
CPAP	30–60 (100 heated)	—		
Phone / router	5–20 each	—		
Sump pump ½ HP	800–1,050	~2,150		
Furnace blower	300–900	up to 2,300		
Well pump	1,000–2,000	2,000–4,000+		

Nameplate and chart values vary. Check your own label or manual, or measure with a plug-in watt meter. Size a generator as: all running watts + the single biggest start surge.

8 Outage kit

- ☐ Flashlight or headlamp each
- ☐ Battery/crank NOAA radio
- ☐ Battery CO alarm(s)
- ☐ Coolers, frozen ice packs
- ☐ No-cook food, 3+ days
- ☐ Warm layers, blankets
- ☐ Car phone charger
- ☐ Outdoor-rated cords
- ☐ Spare batteries
- ☐ Charged power banks
- ☐ Fridge/freezer thermometers
- ☐ Manual can opener
- ☐ Water, 1 gal/person/day
- ☐ Cash in small bills
- ☐ Printed contacts, meds list
- ☐ Fuel, stored safely

Test it: one weekend, flip the main breaker and see how long you last.

Also see the one-pagers *Watch, Warning, Act: Weather Alerts* (warning ahead) and *The Community Lifelines at Home* (what fails with the grid).

Read more
The Power section and What If The Lights Go Out?, a reader's grid-down plan.

Look ahead
The Data Center Next Door: why grid demand and outage risk are rising.

Keep it live
Ready Ledger tracks batteries, fuel, water and food with dates, so the kit is ready.

The full section: *Power*
fortunefavorsthepreprepared.com/power/
The QR code opens the Power section. Safety rules from USDA, CDC and Ready.gov; wattages are typical values, not your equipment's.

Remember, Fortune Favors the Prepared
Semper Paratus, Semper Gumby