

MEMA ISSUES POWER OUTAGE SAFETY TIPS

Extended Loss of Power, During and After a Hurricane, Is a Real Possibility

FRAMINGHAM, MA – Throughout this hurricane season the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) continues to urge residents to prepare for the possible impacts of a hurricane or tropical storm. These storms can bring strong winds that cause widespread power outages.

“As we have experienced in recent years with a variety of storms, accompanying strong winds have the capability to topple utility poles and trees, as well as snap tree limbs causing them to fall on power lines and disrupt electrical service,” warns MEMA Director Kurt Schwartz. “It is important to plan for prolonged power outages and learn the practical steps you can take to keep your family safe.”

While power is often restored in a reasonably short time, history has shown that more destructive hurricanes and tropical storms can cause prolonged power outages because restoration is hindered by multiple downed trees and wires, debris blocking roads, and flooding that limits the utility companies’ ability to address issues. MEMA offers the following tips for preparing for, and dealing with a longer term power outage:

- Check flashlights and portable radios to ensure that they are working.
 - A radio is an important source of weather and emergency information during a storm.
 - Flashlights are safest for lighting, unlike candles which can be a fire hazard.
- Fully charge your cell phone, laptop, and any other devices before the storm.
- Ensure that you have extra batteries as part of your family’s [emergency kit](#).
- If you own a car, purchase a car phone charger so that you can charge your phone if you lose power at your home.
- Download the [Massachusetts Alerts](#) free app to your smartphone to receive important weather alerts and messages from MEMA.
- Consider purchasing a generator to provide power during an outage. Follow the manufacturer's instructions and guidelines when using a generator.
 - - Always use outdoors, away from windows and doors. Carbon Monoxide fumes are odorless and can quickly accumulate indoors.

- Never try to power the house wiring by plugging the generator directly into household wiring, a practice known as “backfeeding.” This is extremely dangerous and presents an electrocution risk to utility workers and neighbors served by the same utility transformer. It also bypasses some of the built-in household circuit protection devices.
- Don’t get overheated. If the power goes out when it is hot outside, stay in the lowest level of your home where it will be coolest, put on light-weight, light-colored clothing, and drink lots of water. Remember to give your pets and/or service animals fresh, cool water; and if you need it, see if your community has “cooling centers” or shelters open.
- Do not call 9-1-1 to report your power outage or to ask for information; use 9-1-1 only for emergencies. Contact your utility company to report the outage and get restoration information.
- Check in on friends, family, and neighbors, particularly those most susceptible to extreme temperatures and power outages such as seniors and those with access and functional needs.

FOOD AND WATER PREPARATION

- If you have a water supply that could be affected by a power outage, such as a well-water pump system, fill your bathtub and spare containers with water.
 - - Water in the bathtub should be used for sanitation purposes only, not as drinking water.
 - Pouring a pail of water from the tub directly into the bowl can flush a toilet.
 - Set your refrigerator and freezer to their coldest settings (remember to reset them back to normal once power is restored). During an outage, minimize the number of times you open the refrigerator or freezer door.
- Food can stay cold in a full refrigerator for up to 24 hours and in a well-packed freezer for 48 hours (24 hours if it is half-packed).

MEDICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Find out about individual assistance that may be available in your community if you need it.
 - - Register in advance with the local emergency management agency, the local fire department, other government agencies or non-profit groups.

- If you have medication that requires refrigeration, check with your pharmacist for guidance on proper storage during an extended outage.
- If you use medical equipment in your home that requires electricity, talk to your health care provider about how you can prepare for its use during a power outage. Ensure you have extra batteries for medical equipment and assistive devices.
- If you have life-support devices that depend on electricity, contact your local electric company about your power needs for life-support devices (home dialysis, suction, breathing machines, etc.) in advance of an emergency. Some utility companies will put you on a "priority reconnection service" list.
 - - Talk to your equipment suppliers about your power options.
 - Let the fire department know that you are dependent on life-support devices.

TRAVELING DURING A POWER OUTAGE

- Keep the gas tank in your car at least half full because gas stations rely on electricity to power their pumps.
- Know where the manual release lever for your electric garage door opener is located and how to operate it. Garage doors can be heavy, so you might need help to lift it.
- If a traffic light is out, treat all intersections as a four-way stop.

SAFE RESTORATION OF POWER AND RECOVERY

- In order to protect against possible voltage irregularities that can occur when power is restored, you should unplug all sensitive electronic equipment, including TVs, stereos, microwave ovens, computers, cordless telephones, answering machines and garage door openers.
- Leave one light on so that you will know when your power returns.
- Be extra cautious if you go outside to inspect for damage after a storm. Downed or hanging electrical wires can be hidden by trees or debris. Never attempt to touch or moved downed lines. Keep children and pets away from them.
 - Call your utility company to report any outage-related problem such as downed wires.
- Throw away any food that has been exposed to temperatures 40° F (4° C) for 2 or more hours or if it has an unusual odor, color or texture. When in doubt, throw it out!

MEMA is the state agency charged with ensuring the state is prepared to withstand, respond to, and recover from all types of emergencies and disasters, including natural hazards, accidents, deliberate attacks, and technological and infrastructure failures. MEMA's staff of professional

planners, communications specialists and operations and support personnel is committed to an all hazards approach to emergency management. By building and sustaining effective partnerships with federal, state and local government agencies, and with the private sector - individuals, families, non-profits and businesses - MEMA ensures the Commonwealth's ability to rapidly recover from large and small disasters by assessing and mitigating threats and hazards, enhancing preparedness, ensuring effective response, and strengthening our capacity to rebuild and recover.

For additional information about MEMA and Hurricane Preparedness, go to www.mass.gov/mema. Continue to follow MEMA updates on *Twitter* at www.twitter.com/MassEMA; *Facebook* at www.facebook.com/MassachusettsEMA; and *YouTube* at www.youtube.com/MassachusettsEMA.

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