

# Blackouts

The biggest Blackout in U.S. history occurred on August 14, 2003, leaving roughly 50 million people without power. Blackouts can happen anywhere, and to anyone, so being prepared is important.

## Step 1: Get a Kit

Get an [Emergency Supply Kit](#), which includes items like non-perishable food, water, a battery-powered or hand-crank radio, extra flashlights and batteries.

## Step 2: Make a Plan

### Prepare Your Family

- Make a [Family Emergency Plan](#). Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so it is important to know how you will contact one another, how you will get back together and what you will do in case of an emergency.
- Plan places where your family will meet, both within and outside of your immediate neighborhood.
- It may be easier to make a long-distance phone call than to call across town, so an out-of-town contact may be in a better position to communicate among separated family members.
- You may also want to inquire about emergency plans at places where your family spends time: work, daycare and school. If no plans exist, consider volunteering to help create one.
- Be sure to consider the specific needs of your family members
  - Notify caregivers and babysitters about your plan.
  - Make plans for your pets.
  - If you use a battery-operated wheelchair, life-support system, or other power-dependent equipment, call your power company before rolling blackouts happen. Many utility companies keep a list and map of the locations of power-dependent customers in case of an emergency. Ask them what alternatives are available in your area. Contact the customer service department of your local utility company(ies) to learn if this service is available in your community.
- Take a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) class from your local [Citizen Corps chapter](#). Keep your training current.

## Step 3: Be Informed

### Prepare Your Home

- Fill plastic containers with water, leaving about an inch of space inside each one for the frozen water to expand. Place the containers in the refrigerator and freezer. This chilled or frozen water will help keep food cold for several hours if the power goes out.
- If you use medication that requires refrigeration, most can be kept in a closed refrigerator for several hours without a problem. If unsure, check with your physician or pharmacist.
- Back up computer files and operating systems. Consider buying extra batteries and a power converter if you use a laptop computer.
- Turn off all computers, monitors, printers, copiers, scanners and other electronic devices when they are not being used.
- Get a high-quality surge protector for your electronic equipment.
- If you have an electric garage door opener, find out where the manual release lever is located and learn how to operate it.
- If you have a telephone at home or at work that requires electricity to work (such as a cordless phone), plan for alternate communication, including having a standard telephone handset, cellular telephone, radio or pager.
- Keep your car fuel tank at least half full because gas stations rely on electricity to power the pumps.
- Remember that equipment such as automated teller machines (ATMs) may not work during a power outage, so make sure you have extra cash at home.
- Know if you live in an area that has rolling blackouts. A rolling blackout occurs when a power company turns off electricity to selected areas to save power. The blackouts are typically for one hour, then the power is restored and another area is turned off. Hospitals, airport control towers, police stations, and fire departments are often exempt from these rolling blackouts. They can happen at any time of day and may affect the same area more than once a day.
- Find out how to keep food safe during and after an emergency by visiting: <http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/emergency/index.html>

## **Listen to Local Officials**

Learn about the emergency plans that have been established in your area by your [state and local government](#). In any emergency, always listen to the instructions given by local emergency management officials. Usually, rolling blackouts occur when power usage increases, especially during hot weather when many people are using air conditioning to keep cool. Power companies try to give a warning when they will turn off power to an area, but they can not always do that.

For further information on how to plan and prepare for blackouts as well as what to do during and after a blackout, visit the [American Red Cross](#) Web site.