

Build a Plan for a Power Outage

February 8, 2013



With a severe winter storm just hours away from unleashing on the Northeast, power outages in the region are likely to leave thousands in the dark this weekend.

The storm could include record snowfall in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Maine, with some areas possibly receiving more than two feet of snow, according to the [National Weather Service](#) (NWS).

In addition to heavy snow, high winds are also likely for coastal communities as far south as Long Island to as far north as Maine. Wind gusts of at least 70 mph are possible Friday night, while 50 mph gusts are expected to continue into Saturday.

Heavy snow and high winds are a recipe for widespread power outages. Prepare a plan for when the power goes out using alternative heating and generator safety resources provided by the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS). Afterwards, find NWS storm updates at [weather.gov](#).

POWER OUTAGE RESOURCES

[Alternative Heat Sources](#)

[Generator Safety](#)

ALTERNATIVE HEAT RESOURCES

WOOD STOVE

- Maintain at least a 36-inch clearance between the stove and combustible materials, such as furniture and clothing.
- Prior to using the stove, place a layer of sand or firebrick in the bottom of the firebox.

SPACE HEATER

- Maintain a 36-inch clearance between the heater and combustible materials, such as bedding, furniture, wall coverings or other flammable items.

- Do not leave a heater unattended.
- Electric heaters should be inspected prior to use. Check the cord for fraying, cracking and look for broken wires or signs of overheating in the device itself.
- Use only heavy-duty extension cords marked with a No. 14 gauge or larger wire.
- If the heater plug has a grounding prong, use only a grounding (three wire) extension cord.
- Never run the heater cord (or any cord) under rugs or carpeting.
- Liquid Fuel-Powered Devices (kerosene or oilheat)
- Never use gasoline or any other substitute fuel.
- Allow the heater to cool down prior to refueling.

FIREPLACE WOOD

- Regular cleaning will keep the fireplace free of obstructions and creosote. If you haven't had maintenance performed recently, use caution when operating the fireplace and never leave it unattended.
- Make sure the damper is open.
- Before use, inspect the chimney and fireplace area for debris and animals that could have taken up residence.
- Maintain proper clearance around the fireplace and keep it clear of combustible materials such as books,
- newspapers and furniture.
- Always close the screen when in use.
- Keep glass doors open during the fire.
- Use a fireplace grate.
- Never burn garbage, rolled newspapers, charcoal or plastic in the fireplace.
- Avoid using gasoline or any liquid accelerant.
- Clean out ashes from previous fires and store them in a noncombustible container with a tight-fitting lid. Keep
- the container outside and away from the house.
- Make sure the fire is completely out before closing the damper.

GAS

- Adjust the milli-volt output.
- Keep the glowing embers and logs clean.
- Inspect and clean the air circulation passages and fan.
- Clean the glass as needed. Avoid obstructing the vents.

PORTABLE GENERATOR RESOURCES

FACTS ABOUT PORTABLE GENERATORS

- Portable generators are less expensive to purchase and install than permanent (standby) generators. Without a supplemental fuel supply, they have a relatively short run-time and may need to be refueled several times a day during a prolonged power outage.
- Most portable generators are designed to work with a few appliances or pieces of electrical equipment that may be plugged directly into the generator without the use of a generator transfer switch.
- This type of generator could be especially useful, but it isn't recommended if you are operating sensitive equipment or have numerous large appliances or business machines.
- When using a portable generator, you also will have to purchase an electric power cord to feed the electrical equipment.
- This should be a heavy duty outdoor-rated extension cord sized for the total electrical load (voltage and amps) you may need.
- Choose a cord that exceeds the total expected load in order to prevent excessive heat buildup and degradation of the power cord.
- Ensure that the cord has three prongs and has no splits, cuts or holes in the external insulation covering.
- An overloaded power cord can potentially start a fire.

SAFETY ISSUES

- Carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning from engine exhaust is a common and serious danger that can result in death if generators are used improperly, in particular, if the fuel is not burned completely.
- Because CO is invisible and odorless, business and/or building owners should install a CO detector to warn of rising CO levels, and test it monthly.

- Never use generators indoors or outside near windows, vents, or air intakes that could allow CO to come indoors.
- Maintain plenty of air flow space around the generator.
- When using an emergency electric power generator, get fresh air immediately if you begin to feel flu like symptoms, sick, dizzy or light headed.
- Carefully follow all instructions on properly “grounding” the generator.
- Keep the generator dry. If needed, operate portable generators under an open canopy type structure. Short circuits may occur in wet conditions resulting in the generator catching fire.

FUEL

- Store fuel in an approved storage container or holding tank designed for such use, and only use fuel that is recommended in the owner’s manual. Never store fuel indoors.
- Do not keep fuel near the electric generator while the electric generator is in use, as it could start a fire.
- Never refuel while the generator is running, and always keep a fully charged fire extinguisher located nearby.
- Keep cords out of the way to avoid injury, but in plain view to allow for visual inspections of any damage, such as fraying or cuts, that could result in a fire.

AVOID BACK FEEDING

- Do not “back feed” power into your electrical system by plugging the generator into a wall outlet. Back feeding will put you and potentially others, including utility line workers, at serious risk because the utility transformer can increase the low voltage from the generator to thousands of volts. Some states have laws that make the generator owner responsible for taking steps to make sure that the generator’s electricity cannot feed back into the power lines, and for notifying the local utility of the location of any commercial, industrial, or residential generator.
- The exterior portions of a generator, even those operated for only a short period of time, can become hot. Avoid touching the generator without protective gear and keep debris clear to avoid a fire.