



Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

CONSUMER FACT SHEET

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Power Outage: SAFETY TIPS AND CUSTOMER RIGHTS



If a power outage occurred today, is your household prepared? The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), your residential utility consumer advocate, brings you information about your rights, preparedness, and tips for staying safe during a power outage.

When your electricity goes out, you should contact your electric company immediately to report the outage. Electric companies offer a variety of ways to report an outage, which include a phone call, the company's website, text message, social media, or through the company's app. In addition, some electric companies offer text alerts to keep you posted on estimated restoration of service. To learn more about these options, contact your electric utility directly.

During the outage, it is a good idea to unplug all major electronic appliances that are power sensitive, such as computers, stereos, and televisions. This will protect these items from a possible power surge when the power comes

back on. Leave one lamp plugged in and turned on to alert you when your service is restored. If you have outdoor solar lights that contain batteries, you may be able to bring them into the house for lighting during a power outage.

Preparedness

Every Ohio household should assemble a storm kit that includes a three-day supply of non-perishable food and water (one gallon per person per day), a charged cell phone, tablet or laptop with a backup power supply, a battery-operated radio or television, a flashlight and extra batteries, and a manual can opener for food (if the kit contains canned food). You can use a charged laptop's usb port to charge most cell phones.

Customers with medical needs

Electric companies take certain factors into consideration when restoring power during an outage. In most cases, electric companies give preference to individuals who rely on life support devices, such as respirators, ventilators or other medical

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The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, represents the interests of 4.5 million households in proceedings before state and federal regulators and in the courts.

The state agency also educates consumers about electric, natural gas, telephone and water issues.

For more information, please visit the OCC website at www.occ.ohio.gov.



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equipment. However, there is no guarantee that these customers will receive power immediately, and they should always have a backup plan in place.

There are important steps that customers with special medical needs should take to ensure that their power is restored as quickly as possible.

- 1. Register with the electric company.** Electric companies offer a program that alerts them about customers with critical needs. By law, all companies are required to maintain and update their list of critical customers annually. Customers need to send in a letter or fill out an application from their electric company stating that they rely on life support devices. The customer's doctor also must verify his or her need for immediate power. *Caution: Being on this list will not guarantee that power will be restored immediately. Customers should always have a backup plan.*
- 2. Consider using a backup generator and registering it.** A generator will provide electricity during an outage. Always rely on a professional electrician to set it up. Properly installing a generator will protect it from damage and prevent a backflow of electrical current into the utility lines that may injure service professionals. Never use a generator inside the home or in an attached garage because carbon monoxide build up can be life-threatening. Customers should notify their electric company that they have a generator.

Electrical outage myths

When the lights go out there are many things to think about, like reporting the outage and locating necessities such as batteries, a wireless radio, and other supplies. Below, the OCC clarifies some common myths about power outages in the home to help consumers be better prepared.

MYTH: During an electric outage, homes with older adults and young children are given priority when restoring power.

FACT: Typically, electric companies do not establish a priority for restoration efforts based on the age of those in the home. See above for information on household members with special medical needs.

MYTH: The electric company is required to pay for or replace any food that spoils as a result of a power outage.

FACT: There is no requirement that the company compensate customers for any food lost due to an outage. To keep food safe, consumers without refrigeration should:

- Use foods first that may spoil, such as dairy products and meat. Once these foods are no longer cold to the touch they should be thrown out.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to conserve cold air.
- Place perishable foods in a cooler packed with ice.

When an outage occurs in colder months, customers should close doors to any rooms not being used to prevent heat loss. In warmer months, customers should close their blinds and curtains to keep the home cool.

MYTH: Utilities must issue credits for the time that service is out.

FACT: Generally, utility customers are not entitled to credits for the time that their service is out.