BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

Carbon monoxide is what kills people in blackouts.

It is colorless and odorless. The CDC reports that more than 400 Americans die every year from unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning not linked to fires, and more than 100,000 visit an emergency room.

IF A CO ALARM SOUNDS, OR ANYONE FEELS DIZZY, WEAK OR UNWELL

1

Everyone outside. Now.

Straight to fresh air. Do not stop to look for the source.

2

Call 911 from outside.

Fresh air first, then the call, in that order.

3

Nobody goes back in.

Not for a pet, a phone or a minute, until emergency responders say it is safe.

Symptoms are often described as flu-like: headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain, confusion. **People who are asleep or have been drinking can die before they ever have symptoms.** That is why the alarm matters more than vigilance.

A ANYTHING THAT BURNS FUEL

01 Never run a generator, grill, camp stove or any gasoline, propane or charcoal burner indoors, in a garage, basement or crawlspace, in a carport or on a porch. **Opening doors and windows is not enough ventilation.** Not for a few minutes.

02 A generator runs outside only, at least **20 feet from the house**, with the exhaust pointed away from it.

03 Turn it off and let it cool before refueling.

04 Fit battery-operated or battery-backup CO detectors **near every sleeping area**, and check them regularly.

05 Never use a gas stove or oven to heat your home. It raises the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning and of fire.

B CONNECTING A GENERATOR

01 Plug appliances **directly into the generator**.

02 **Never plug a generator into a wall outlet.** This is backfeeding. It can electrocute utility workers and neighbors, and it bypasses your home's own circuit protection.

03 House wiring may only be powered through a properly installed transfer switch, approved for the use and installed by a qualified electrician, before an outage. If you do not have one, run appliances directly and do nothing else.

04 Battery or solar power stations produce no carbon monoxide and can be used indoors.

C DOWNED POWER LINES

01 **Never touch a fallen power line, or anything in contact with one.** Assume every downed line is live: circuits do not always switch off when a line falls. Call the power company to report it.

02 Do not walk or drive through standing water with a downed line in it. If a line falls on your car, stay inside the vehicle. If you think someone has been electrocuted, call 911.

Sources. CO facts and figures: CDC, Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Basics (cdc.gov/carbon-monoxide/about); CPSC Carbon Monoxide Information Center. Alarm response: CPSC (get outside to fresh air, then call 911); CPSC Safety Alert 5123, Portable Generator Hazards. Generator placement: CPSC winter safety release, 2026. Detectors: CDC, "When the power goes out, keep your generator outside." Gas stove: Ready.gov/power-outages. Connection: OSHA, Grounding Requirements for Portable Generators; CPSC 5123. Battery power stations: Public Safety Canada, Get Prepared, Power outages. Power lines: CDC, After a Disaster (cdc.gov/natural-disasters/response); OSHA, Working Safely Around Downed Electrical Wires.

MINUTES 0 TO 60

The first hour.

What to do in the first sixty minutes of a power outage, in the order it matters. Print spares and put one where you would look for a flashlight.

0–5 MINUTES

FIND OUT HOW BIG THIS IS

- [ ] Look outside. If the street is lit and you are not, the fault is probably yours, so check your breaker panel.
- [ ] If the street is dark too, report it to your utility. Many never know an outage happened until someone calls.
- [ ] Flashlights, not candles. Ready.gov names candles as a fire hazard in an outage.

5–15 MINUTES

PROTECT THE HOUSE FROM THE POWER COMING BACK

- [ ] Unplug appliances and electronics. Power can return with surges that damage them. **Exception: leave the refrigerator and freezer plugged in**, so they restart by themselves.
- [ ] Switch off anything that was running when it went dark (oven, stovetop, iron, heater) so it does not restart in an empty room.
- [ ] Leave one lamp switched on. It tells you the moment power is back.

15–30 MINUTES

SHUT THE COLD IN AND START THE CLOCK

- [ ] Write down the time the power went off. Every food decision from here is arithmetic against that number.
- [ ] Refrigerator and freezer doors stay shut. Every opening spends part of your window.
- [ ] If the freezer is half empty, fill the gaps. Grouped packages protect each other, and frozen jugs of water work and become drinking water later.
- [ ] Two separate rules. **Refrigerated perishables** (meat, poultry, fish, eggs, leftovers): discard after 4 hours without power. **Any single item** held at 40°F or above for more than 2 hours: discard.

4 h	48 h	24 h
REFRIGERATOR, DOOR SHUT	FULL FREEZER	HALF-FULL FREEZER

30–45 MINUTES

WATER, BEFORE YOU NEED IT

- [ ] Fill containers now. Pumped supplies, and anything that relies on pressure above the ground floor, can fail while the power is off.
- [ ] One gallon per person per day, for drinking and sanitation together.
- [ ] Listen for water advisories. If one is issued, use bottled water or bring clear water to a rolling boil for 1 minute (3 minutes above 6,500 feet).

45–60 MINUTES

PEOPLE, PHONES AND MEDICINE

- [ ] Stop using your phone for anything that is not information or contact. It is now your radio and your flashlight.
- [ ] Check on anyone nearby who is elderly, alone, or dependent on powered medical equipment, if it is safe to do so.
- [ ] **Refrigerated medicines:** read the label, then call your pharmacist or doctor for advice and a new supply. If a medicine is needed to sustain life and a replacement is not readily available, the FDA says it may be used until you can get a new supply. Do not guess, and do not take dosing advice from a page, this one included.
- [ ] Decide now whether you are staying. If the house becomes too hot or too cold, going to friends or a community shelter is the plan, not the last resort.

Sources, all US federal. Candles, surges, unplugging: Ready.gov/power-outages and Ready.gov/kids. Food: FoodSafety.gov, Food Safety During Power Outage; CDC, Keep Food Safe After a Disaster; CDC, Protect Yourself During a Power Outage; USDA FSIS, Keep Your Food Safe During Emergencies. Water: Ready.gov/kit; CDC, How to Make Water Safe in an Emergency. Medicine: Ready.gov/power-outages; FDA, Safe Drug Use After a Natural Disaster. Staying or going: CDC, Protect Yourself During a Power Outage; FEMA power outage information sheet.