



Deval L. Patrick
Governor

Andrea J. Cabral
Secretary

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND SAFETY



Kurt Schwartz
Director

MASSACHUSETTS EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

400 Worcester Road Framingham, MA 01702-5399

Tel: 508-820-2000 Fax: 508-820-2030

Website: www.mass.gov/mema

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CONTACT: Peter Judge, MEMA PIO
(508) 820-2002

MEMA ISSUES POWER OUTAGE SAFETY TIPS

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

FRAMINGHAM, MA - "The severe winds experienced during hurricanes and tropical storms have the potential to cause power outages throughout the Commonwealth during this Hurricane Season," warns Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency Director Kurt Schwartz. "As we have experienced in recent years with a variety of storms, 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."

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) has the following tips for dealing with a possible power outage:

- Check flashlights and portable radios to ensure that they are working, and you have extra batteries. A radio is an important source of critical weather and emergency information during a storm.
- If a storm is coming that may bring power outages, fully charge your cell phone, laptop, and any other devices in advance of a power outage.
- If your water supply could be affected by a power outage (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, do not open the refrigerator or freezer door unnecessarily. 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). Throw away any food that has been exposed to temperatures 40° F (4° C) for 2 hours or more or that has an unusual odor, color or texture. When in doubt, throw it out!
- If you have medication that requires refrigeration, check with your pharmacist for guidance on proper storage during an extended outage.
- 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 and also let the fire department know that you are dependent on life-support devices

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- 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.
- 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.
- In order to protect against possible voltage irregularities that can occur when power is restored, you should unplug all sensitive electronic equipment, including TVs, computers, stereo, DVR, VCR, microwave oven, cordless telephone, answering machine and garage door opener. (Review the process for manually operating an electric garage door.)
- Leave one light on so that you will know when your power returns.
- Don’t get overheated. If the power goes out when it is hot outside, take these steps to stay cool: stay in the lowest level of your home where it will be coolest; put on light-weight, light-colored clothing; drink lots of water, even if you don’t feel thirsty; remember to give your pets and/or service animal fresh, cool water; and if you need it, see if your community has “cooling centers” or shelters open.
- Be extra cautious when you go outside to inspect for damage after a storm. Downed or hanging electrical wires can be hidden by trees or debris, and could be live. Never attempt to touch or move downed lines, and keep children and pets away from them. Do not touch anything power lines are touching, such as tree branches or fences. Always assume a downed line is a live line. Call your utility company to report any outage-related problem.
- If driving and traffic lights are out, treat every intersection as a four-way stop.
- 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.

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) is the state agency responsible for coordinating federal, state, local, voluntary and private resources during emergencies and disasters in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. MEMA provides leadership to: develop plans for effective response to all hazards, disasters or threats; train emergency personnel to protect the public; provide information to the citizenry; and assist individuals, families, businesses and communities to mitigate against, prepare for, and respond to and recover from emergencies, both natural and man made. For additional information about MEMA and Preparedness, go to www.mass.gov/mema. Also, continue to follow MEMA updates on *Twitter* at www.twitter.com/MassEMA; *Facebook* at www.facebook.com/MassachusettsEMA. Download the free *ping4alert!* app to your Smartphone to receive important weather alerts and emergency messages from MEMA. Easy instructions are available at www.mass.gov/mema/mobileapp.