

Green Mountain Energy® Blog

# What to Do During a Winter Storm Power Outage



Winter storms can be unpredictable. They can bring cold temperatures, ice, snow, strong winds and unexpected power outages, but being prepared can make all the difference for your family's safety and comfort. Here you can learn more about the steps you can take to help you confidently handle a winter outage.

## Before the outage

The best way to prepare for a winter storm is to do all your preparations long before a storm arrives. It's important to understand the risks, whom to contact and what you need to be prepared. Use this helpful list of winter storm preparations to ensure you're ready for whatever the weather may bring.

## Understanding winter power outage risks

Winter power outages aren't just inconvenient; they can pose a threat to your well-being and your home. These disruptions are frequently triggered by severe weather conditions common to the season, such as freezing rain, ice accumulating on power lines or heavy snow causing tree limbs to fall and damage infrastructure. Additionally, a surge in energy demand on the grid during colder months can sometimes lead to outages. Being mindful of your energy use can help the grid during peak demand.

If the power goes out in the winter, several critical risks emerge:

- Health and safety hazards like hypothermia, frostbite, carbon monoxide poisoning and foodborne illnesses
- Property damage risks like burst pipes, structural damage and harm to appliances

By closely monitoring local weather forecasts and taking steps to prepare in advance, you can enhance your safety and minimize the risk of potential damage.

## Know your providers: Who does what?

Understanding who your electricity providers are is key, especially during an outage. While both work together to power your home, they have distinct responsibilities:

- Your **TDSP (Transmission and Distribution Service Provider)** manages the physical infrastructure, maintains power lines, restores service and provides outage maps/reporting tools.
- Your **REP (Retail Electric Provider)**, like Green Mountain Energy, manages your electricity plan and customer account, handling billing and contract details.

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Essentially, your REP helps you choose the right electricity plan, while your TDSP ensures power delivery and repairs. Knowing the difference helps you contact the right provider quickly.

Learn more about the [difference between your energy provider and utility company](#).

## Outage maps and reporting

During a power outage, it can be crucial to stay updated on what's happening in your area. You can do this by staying up to date on local news and weather, and by utilizing your TDSP's resources:

- Bookmark your TDSP's outage map to quickly see affected areas, check estimated restoration times and sometimes identify the cause of an outage
- Save your TDSP's contact information to quickly [report outages](#), get status updates and report hazards like downed power lines

Having these resources at your fingertips means less time searching when you're already without power and more time focusing on keeping your household safe and comfortable.

## Building your emergency kit

Having a well-stocked emergency kit can make all the difference when you're faced with winter weather. Gathering these essentials before a storm can help you stay comfortable and safe and reduce stress during an unexpected power outage:

Here's a detailed look at what to include in your emergency kit:

- Flashlights and headlamps for safe visibility
- Shelf-stable food and water that are easily prepared without appliances
- Fresh batteries for all battery-powered devices, or consider solar-powered devices for a cleaner power option
- Charged devices and power packs for communication and information access
- First-aid kit for minor injuries and essential prescriptions
- Battery-powered or hand-cranked radio for emergency broadcasts and news
- Safe backup heating options like indoor-rated heaters with proper ventilation, and don't forget, you should never use outdoor grills or generators indoors
- Warm clothing and blankets to stay warm during frigid temperatures
- Cash for purchases if electronic systems are offline

## Communication plan: Staying connected

A clear communication plan is essential during a winter power outage for getting updates and help. Ensure your family has a plan for emergencies:

- Create an emergency contact list: Keep a physical list of important phone numbers (family, TDSP, emergency services) accessible
- Establish a family check-in plan: Decide how your household will communicate if separated

Staying connected helps you get information and ensures you can reach out for assistance. For more winter prep tips, check out our [Winter Weather Guide](#) and [Winter Energy Savings](#) resources.

## During the outage

It's important to remember to stay calm and prioritize safety when the power goes out. Check your TDSP's outage map or call its reporting line for updates, rather than your REP or emergency services. Reliable information on affected areas and estimated restoration times will come directly from your TDSP.

## Staying warm and safe

Maintaining warmth and safety is a top priority during a winter power outage. Consider these safety tips when experiencing a winter outage:

- Gather in one room to conserve body heat and use blankets and layers to stay warm
- Block cold drafts by closing curtains and placing towels at the bottom of doors
- Use supplemental heat safely by following all instructions for indoor-rated heaters or fireplaces and ensuring proper ventilation
- Prioritize safety in the dark by using flashlights and keeping pathways clear to prevent falls

## Food storage and safety

Preventing food spoilage and ensuring safe eating are also important when experiencing an outage. When the power goes out, follow these food storage safety tips:

- Keep fridge and freezer doors closed to maximize how long food stays cold (up to 4 hours for fridges, 24-48 hours for freezers)
- Discard perishable foods that have been above 40°F (4°C) for over two hours
- Use outdoor snow or ice in a cooler for extra food preservation, if safely accessible

## Conserving power

While the power is out, help your essential devices last longer with these strategies:

- Use devices sparingly and limit phone, laptop and tablet use to essentials
- Enable low-power modes to extend your device's battery life
- Text instead of calling to save battery life

For more helpful tips and resources during an emergency, visit our [Emergency Resources](#) page.

## After the outage

Once the power is restored, you can follow these steps to safely and smoothly transition back to your normal routine:

- **Gradually restart electronics:** Plug in appliances one by one to avoid surges. Confirm heating and essential appliances are working.
- **Inspect your home:** Check for burst pipes, test carbon monoxide detectors and ensure ventilation if alternate heating was used.
- **Review food safety:** Discard perishable foods that were above 40°F (4°C) for more than two hours.
- **Restock and reflect:** Replenish supplies and update your outage plan based on your experience.

Preparing for winter power outages is an essential part of responsible home management and sustainable living. By taking these proactive steps, you not only protect your household but also contribute to a more resilient community. Stay safe, stay informed and remember that smart energy choices extend to how we prepare for the unexpected.

Have questions or want to access your account management resources? Visit our [Customer Service Center](#) or contact us to speak with a [Customer Service agent](#).



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