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PREPPER HANDOUT #1
FREE · PRINT & KEEP

72-Hour Blackout Checklist

Light, heat, food, water and medical needs for the first three days without power. Check off what you have today, so you aren't scrambling later.

> Most outages are short. A few last days. The goal is simple: on day one you should be able to **see, stay warm (or cool), eat, drink and take your medicine** without leaving home.

1 · LIGHT

- ☐ A **headlamp for every person**, kept by the bed, plus a flashlight for each adult
- ☐ Extra batteries for each light and radio (check sizes: AA, AAA, D)
- ☐ Battery lantern for each main room; plug-in emergency lights in halls and stairs
- ☐ Skip candles. The Red Cross advises battery lights instead because of the fire risk

2 · HEAT & COOLING

- ☐ Blankets, sleeping bags, hats and warm layers for everyone
- ☐ **Carbon monoxide (CO) alarms with battery backup** on every level and outside every sleeping area; test monthly
- ☐ Never heat the home with a gas stove or oven
- ☐ Generators, propane camp stoves, charcoal and grills **outdoors only**, never in a garage even with the door open. Generators at least **20 feet** from windows, doors and vents. Indoors, only a butane stove labeled for indoor use, with a window cracked (see Handout #9)
- ☐ Hot weather plan: know where your nearest cooling center is
- ☐ Battery or hand-crank fan; light, loose clothing

3 · FOOD

- ☐ At least **3 days** of non-perishable food that needs no cooking
- ☐ Manual can opener (test it!)
- ☐ Paper plates, cups, utensils, garbage bags
- ☐ Appliance thermometers in the fridge and freezer
- ☐ Cooler and a plan for ice
- ☐ Pet food for 3 days

Keep the doors shut. A closed refrigerator keeps food cold for about **4 hours**. A full freezer holds its temperature for about **48 hours** (about **24 hours** if half full). Throw out food that has been at **40°F or higher for 2 hours or more**, or that smells, looks or feels wrong. *When in doubt, throw it out.* (USDA, Ready.gov)

4 · WATER

- ☐ **1 gallon per person per day** for drinking and sanitation, for at least 3 days
- ☐ Extra water for pets, hot weather or anyone who is sick
- ☐ Fill pitchers and pots if a storm is forecast

People & pets _____ × 3 days × 1 gallon = _____ gallons needed

Gallons I have now: _____

5 · MEDICAL

- ☐ A **7-day supply** of each prescription, as the Red Cross recommends (ask your pharmacist how)
- ☐ Written list of medications, doses and your doctor's phone number
- ☐ A plan for medicines that need refrigeration (ask your pharmacist)
- ☐ Backup power or a plan for oxygen, CPAP or other powered medical devices (call your provider and power company now)
- ☐ First aid kit, spare eyeglasses, hearing-aid batteries

Refrigerated medicine: Ready.gov advises that if the power is out for more than a day, you should discard medication that should be refrigerated *unless the label says otherwise*. If a life depends on it, call your doctor or pharmacist right away.

6 · COMMUNICATION & HOME

- ☐ Battery or hand-crank radio (NOAA Weather Radio if possible)
- ☐ One charged power bank per person and a car phone charger
- ☐ Phone numbers written on paper (your phone may die)
- ☐ Know how to open your garage door by hand
- ☐ Surge protectors; unplug electronics during the outage and leave one light on so you know when power is back
- ☐ Some cash in small bills (card readers and ATMs may be down)

THE FIRST 72 HOURS, STEP BY STEP

First hour

- ☐ Check on everyone in the home. Get flashlights out, not candles
- ☐ Check whether neighbors have power. Report the outage to your utility
- ☐ Turn off or unplug major appliances and electronics

- [ ] Keep fridge and freezer doors shut; note the time the power went out: _____
- [ ] Turn on the radio for official updates

Day 1

- [ ] Eat refrigerated food first, then freezer food, then pantry food
- [ ] Gather everyone into one room to share warmth (or the coolest room in summer)
- [ ] Charge phones from power banks or the car (run the car outdoors only, never in a garage)
- [ ] Check on older neighbors and anyone living alone

Day 2

- [ ] Check fridge and freezer thermometers; discard food at 40°F+ for 2 hours or more
- [ ] Review medicine supply and refrigerated medications
- [ ] Count water on hand; drink what you need, don't ration unless officials say to
- [ ] Rotate batteries; keep lights off when not needed

Day 3

- [ ] Decide: stay or go? If home is unsafe (too cold, too hot, no water), go to a shelter, warming or cooling center, or family
- [ ] Watch for signs of hypothermia or heat illness in everyone, especially older adults
- [ ] Restock what you've used and note what you wished you had

CARBON MONOXIDE KILLS, AND YOU CAN'T SEE OR SMELL IT
Symptoms include headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain and confusion (CDC). If you feel sick, dizzy or weak, **get to fresh air right away and call 911**.

MY BLACKOUT INFORMATION

Power company outage number: _____

Account number (for reporting outages): _____

Nearest warming / cooling center:

_____

Neighbor I'll check on (name & phone):

_____

What I wished I had last time: _____

FOOD SAFETY CHART · REFRIGERATOR

A closed fridge keeps food safe for **about 4 hours**. After that, check each item. Rule: food held at **40°F or above for more than 2 hours**. **Never taste food to decide. When in doubt, throw it out.** Power went out at: _____ Back on at: _____

FOOD	ABOVE 40°F FOR MORE THAN 2 HOURS
Meat, poultry, seafood	
Raw or leftover cooked meat, poultry, fish, seafood; soy meat substitutes	**Discard**
Thawing meat or poultry	**Discard**
Meat, tuna, shrimp, chicken or egg salad	**Discard**
Gravy, stuffing, broth	**Discard**
Lunchmeats, hot dogs, bacon, sausage, dried beef	**Discard**
Pizza (any topping)	**Discard**
Canned hams labeled “Keep Refrigerated”; opened canned meats and fish	**Discard**
Casseroles, soups, stews	**Discard**
Cheese	
Soft cheeses (Brie, cottage, cream, Monterey Jack, mozzarella, ricotta, queso fresco, etc.)	**Discard**
Shredded or low-fat cheeses	**Discard**
Hard cheeses (Cheddar, Colby, Swiss, Parmesan, provolone, Romano); processed cheese; grated Parmesan in a can or jar	Keep
Dairy & eggs	
Milk, cream, sour cream, buttermilk, evaporated milk, yogurt, eggnog, soy milk	**Discard**
Opened baby formula	**Discard**
Butter, margarine	Keep
Fresh shell eggs, hard-cooked eggs, egg dishes; custards, puddings, quiche	**Discard**
Fruits & vegetables	
Cut fresh fruit; sliced or shredded coconut	**Discard**
Uncut fresh fruit; opened fruit juice; opened canned fruit; dried fruit	Keep
Cut fresh vegetables; pre-cut packaged greens; cooked vegetables; cooked tofu	**Discard**
Opened vegetable juice; baked potatoes; potato salad; commercial garlic in oil	**Discard**
Uncut fresh vegetables; fresh mushrooms, herbs, spices	Keep
Sauces & spreads	
Opened mayonnaise, tartar sauce, horseradish	Discard if above 50°F for more than 8 hours
Peanut butter; jelly, relish, mustard, ketchup, olives, pickles; Worcestershire, soy, BBQ, hoisin; opened vinegar-based dressings	Keep
Fish sauce, oyster sauce; opened creamy dressings; opened spaghetti sauce	**Discard**
Breads, grains, desserts	
Bread, rolls, cakes, muffins, tortillas; waffles, pancakes, bagels; fruit pies	Keep
Refrigerator biscuits, rolls, cookie dough; cooked pasta, rice, potatoes; pasta salads; fresh pasta	**Discard**
Cheesecake; cream-filled pastries; pies with egg or milk fillings	**Discard**

FOOD SAFETY CHART · FREEZER

A **full** freezer holds a safe temperature for **about 48 hours** (**about 24 hours** if half full) with the door shut. Food with ice crystals, or at 40°F or below, can be refrozen, though quality may suffer. Use a thermometer, not your hand.

FOOD	STILL HAS ICE CRYSTALS / FEELS REFRIGERATOR-COLD	ABOVE 40°F FOR MORE THAN 2 HOURS
Meat, poultry, seafood (all cuts); stews, soups	Refreeze	**Discard**
Milk	Refreeze (some texture loss)	**Discard**
Eggs out of shell, egg products	Refreeze	**Discard**
Ice cream, frozen yogurt	**Discard**	**Discard**
Soft and semi-soft cheese	Refreeze (some texture loss)	**Discard**
Hard cheeses	Refreeze	Refreeze
Shredded cheeses; cheesecake	Refreeze	**Discard**
Fruit juices; packaged fruit	Refreeze	Refreeze (discard if mold, yeasty smell or slime)
Vegetable juices; packaged or blanched vegetables	Refreeze	Discard if held above 40°F for 6 hours
Breads, rolls, muffins, cakes (no custard filling)	Refreeze	Refreeze
Cakes, pies, pastries with custard or cheese filling	Refreeze	**Discard**
Pie crusts, bread dough	Refreeze (some quality loss)	Refreeze (considerable quality loss)
Pasta or rice casseroles	Refreeze	**Discard**
Flour, cornmeal, nuts; waffles, pancakes, bagels	Refreeze	Refreeze
Frozen meals and entrées (pizza, sausage biscuits, meat pies, convenience foods)	Refreeze	**Discard**

Chart adapted from USDA guidance as published on FoodSafety.gov, “Food Safety During Power Outage” (last reviewed Aug. 8, 2024). Some items condensed into groups; wording otherwise follows the USDA chart.

Get the next handout free: join **Watchmen Weekly**, the calm, practical weekly newsletter from The Poplar Report. Sign up at **thepoplarreport.com**. Share this sheet: **thepoplarreport.com/blackout**

SOURCES: Ready.gov, “Power Outages” (ready.gov/power-outages); Ready.gov, “Build a Kit” (ready.gov/kit); American Red Cross, “Survival Kit Supplies” (redcross.org); American Red Cross, “Winter Storm Safety” (redcross.org); CDC, “Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Basics” (cdc.gov/carbon-monoxide); Ready.gov, “Extreme Heat” (ready.gov/heat); USDA via FoodSafety.gov, “Food Safety During Power Outage” (foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/food-safety-during-power-outage).
General preparedness information only. It is not medical, legal or financial advice. Always follow instructions from local officials and your own doctor. Prepared October 2026; agency guidance can change, so check the sources above for updates.