Hurricane Safety – When the Power’s Out Meeting Kit

WHAT’S AT STAKE

Losing power during and after a hurricane isn’t just an inconvenience; it can be a real problem. Think about it: no lights, no AC or heat, no fridge, maybe even no running water. Suddenly, things get a lot more complicated. It can make it tough to stay safe, keep food from spoiling, and even get in touch with people if you need help. That’s why getting ready for power outages is a big part of hurricane preparedness. It’s about more than just having a few candles; it’s about having a plan to keep yourself and your family safe and comfortable when the lights go out.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Losing power during a hurricane isn’t just about being in the dark. It can create a whole host of problems. For starters, you lose access to essential services. No electricity means no lights, obviously, but it also means no air conditioning or heating, which can be a real issue depending on the weather. Refrigeration goes out, which means food can spoil quickly, and you might lose access to running water if your system relies on electric pumps. It disrupts everyday life in a big way.

Beyond the inconveniences, power outages can also cut off your communication with the outside world. Landlines, Internet, and even cellphone service can be affected, making it difficult to get emergency alerts or call for help if you need it. On the other hand, food spoilage is a serious concern. Without refrigeration, perishable foods can start to go bad within a couple of hours, especially in warm weather. Eating spoiled food can lead to food poisoning and other illnesses.

Another big danger is carbon monoxide poisoning. This can happen if you improperly use generators, grills, or other fuel-burning devices indoors. Carbon monoxide is an odourless, colourless gas that can be fatal. It’s crucial to use these devices safely and only outdoors. Finally, using candles or other open flames for lighting increases the risk of fires. It’s easy to accidentally knock them over or leave them unattended, which can lead to a house fire. And if the power outage disables security systems and outdoor lighting, it could make your home more vulnerable to crime.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Alright, so let’s talk about how to prepare for and handle those hurricane-related power outages. It’s all about planning and knowing what to do when the lights go out.

Long-Term Preparation (Before a Storm Threatens):

- Assemble a Power Outage Emergency Kit (Go-Bag): Don’t just throw a few things in a box; think about what you’ll really need for several days without power.
    - Lighting: Flashlights are essential, and make sure you have plenty of extra batteries. Headlamps are also great because they keep your hands free. Avoid candles if possible; they’re a fire hazard.
    - Communication: A battery-powered or hand-crank radio is crucial for staying updated on weather reports and emergency information.
    - Food and Water: Stock up on non-perishable food that doesn’t require cooking, like canned goods, granola bars, protein bars, dried fruit, and nuts. And don’t forget a manual can opener! Bottled water is essential; aim for at least one gallon per person per day for several days.
    - First-Aid and Medications: Include a well-stocked first-aid kit and a supply of any prescription and over-the-counter medications you need.
    - Other Essentials: Think about things like matches in a

waterproof container, a whistle to signal for help, a multi-tool, garbage bags, and moist towelettes for sanitation.

Have a Backup Power Source (If Possible and Safe)

If you can afford it and it’s appropriate for your situation, a generator can be very helpful. But remember, generators can be dangerous if used incorrectly. So, generators can be super helpful, but they can also be dangerous if you’re not careful. First things first, get the right size. Too small, and it won’t run everything you need. Too big, and you’re just wasting gas. The most important thing is learning how to use it before the storm. You don’t want to be fumbling around in the dark trying to figure it out. That means knowing how to ground it properly, using heavy-duty outdoor extension cords, and knowing how to refuel it safely – ideally when it’s off and cooled down. And don’t forget to store extra gas in approved containers – away from your house – to avoid any fire hazards.

Immediate Preparations (When a Storm is Imminent):

Alright, the storm is on its way, and it looks like the power might go out. Now’s the time for some last-minute prep. First, charge up everything – your cellphones, laptops, tablets, portable chargers, you name it. You want to have as much battery life as possible. Next, if your water supply is also at risk, fill up bathtubs, sinks, and any other clean containers with water. This water can be used for cleaning and flushing toilets if the water goes out too. Finally, gather all your emergency supplies and bring them to a central, easy-to-reach spot in your house. Make sure everyone in your family knows where the kit is located. If you have a refrigerator and freezer, turn them to their coldest settings to help keep food fresh longer if the power goes out.

During a Power Outage:

The lights are out. Now what? First, use flashlights or battery-powered lanterns for lighting. Don’t use candles or other open flames; they’re a serious fire hazard. To make your batteries last

longer, try to limit how much you use your cellphones and other devices. Only use them for essential communication. If you have a generator, remember the cardinal rule: never run it indoors, in a garage, or in any enclosed or partially enclosed space. Carbon monoxide poisoning is a real and deadly risk. Always operate your generator outdoors in a well-ventilated area, away from windows and doors.

FINAL WORD

When the power goes out during a hurricane, it’s all about being prepared and being able to take care of yourself and your family. Having a well-stocked emergency kit, knowing how to use it, and understanding how to stay safe are the most important things. A little preparation can make a huge difference when the lights go out.