

Electric Power Outages: A PUCO Guide to Being Prepared

While the electric distribution system in Ohio is typically safe and reliable, service interruptions can result from weather conditions such as thunderstorms, high winds, or snow storms. The PUCO has some suggestions and answers to frequently asked questions if weather events should occur and cause a service interruption.

Being Prepared Year-Round

For practical purposes, every home should have a storm kit. The following items should be included for those unexpected power interruptions.

- Portable, battery-powered radio
- Flashlights
- Extra batteries
- Manual can opener and bottle opener
- A supply of non-perishable foods needing little or no cooking (Be sure you pack any special dietary foods, baby food, and formula, if needed.)
- Water stored in clean, non-corrosive, non-breakable, tightly covered containers such as soft drink bottles - plan for at least two quarts per person per day
- Personal hygiene products, sanitary supplies, diapers, and first aid supplies
- Ice chest and ice or frozen ice packs
- Camp stove or canned heat stove, and fuel for three to five days; or hibachi grill and charcoal
- If possible, have access to a cellular phone. Your home's hardwire or cordless telephone may not work without electricity.

You will also want to know how to manually open and close any electric garage doors, security doors, or gates. Have surge protectors on important electrical equipment such as computers, DVD players, and televisions. Be aware that during an outage, gas appliances with electronic ignitions will not work because electricity is needed to ignite the natural gas. Appliances requiring fans or other electric devices to run (such as central heating units and gas clothes dryers) will not operate.

What should I do if I see a downed utility line?

Do not touch or attempt to move the line. The current running through the line can be deadly. You should contact emergency personnel and the electric company immediately. Stay a safe distance from the line at all times.

What should I do during a power outage?

All outages should be immediately reported to your electric company. Since many other customers may be calling at the same time, you may not be able to speak with a live person. You can still report your outage by following the automated instructions. This will let the utility company know the location and extent of the outage. The company must keep a record of all outages. To report an outage call:

American Electric Power

Columbus Southern Power: (800) 277-2177

Ohio Power: (800) 672-2231

Duke Energy Ohio

(513) 651-4182

(800) 543-5599

Dayton Power & Light

(937) 331-3900

(800) 433-8500

FirstEnergy

(800) 589-3101 (CEI Division)

(800) 633-4766 (OE Division)

(800) 447-3333 (TE Division)

You should also unplug all major appliances and electronics, such as computers and televisions, to protect them from a possible power surge when the power comes back on. By leaving one light on, you will be able to tell when your service is restored.

During cold weather, keep warm safely. Put on extra clothes or wrap up in blankets. Don't rely on gas stoves, kerosene space heaters, charcoal grilles or other open-flame heat sources. Deadly carbon monoxide gas, which is odorless and invisible, may build up in your home without you realizing it.

How does the electric company prioritize restoration?

The company will first assess the extent and geographical locations of the outage. Restoration of power to critical facilities, including police and fire stations, hospitals, and water plants is the primary goal. After service is restored in these areas, the company can then focus on others without power.

What if a member of my family is on medical or life support during a power outage?

The PUCO requires all electric companies to maintain a list of critical customers. However, this list does not guarantee uninterrupted service or immediate service restoration in the event of an outage. The PUCO requires that electric companies notify their customers annually about the critical customer program. The electric company must also provide critical customers with written information concerning options and responsibilities during outages. Those in this situation should plan for contingency measures, such as back-up generators, an alternate power source, or evacuation to another location.

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What can the PUCO do during a power outage?

When an outage is determined to affect 2,500 customers in an area for four hours or more, or when an outage affects 100 or more customers in an area for 24 hours or more, the company must submit an outage report to the PUCO. Also, if an outage at a facility operated by a power company is projected to last more than four hours, or will affect public safety, the PUCO must be notified. After receiving the notice, the PUCO constantly monitors the situation. In certain instances, the PUCO may assist in the coordination of services that enable the power company to restore power more quickly, such as working with the department of transportation to clear icy roads after a winter storm.

What can be done to reduce outages in my neighborhood?

Your electric company has the right to trim or remove any obstruction in electric lines that may cause service problems during heavy winds, or even during calm conditions. This generally refers to the trimming of trees, but may include any object that interferes with electric lines. If you see something that has the potential to cause problems, notify your power company and give them the location of the obstruction.

What can I do about trees growing into power lines?

Your electric company has the right to trim any trees or tree limbs along a public street, alley, or other public thoroughfare that may be growing into the power lines and have the potential to cause service problems. This not only applies to the removal of tree limbs or other naturally growing materials, but to any material that has the potential to cause service problems, such as fences, garages, or basketball hoops. The electric company, however, is not responsible for the lines that are attached to your home or apartment building. Any limbs or plants growing into or around those lines are the responsibility of the property owner.

What can the PUCO do to improve service reliability?

Each year, electric companies must submit ideas on how they can improve reliability. The companies must submit a list of their worst-performing circuits and submit possible solutions to improve those circuits over the next year. In some cases, a more long-term improvement effort is outlined. These ideas are reviewed, and the progress of their implementation is monitored by the PUCO.

What should I do if I experience frequent outages?

All outages should be immediately reported to your electric company. The company must keep a record of all outages. If you are not satisfied with the reliability of your electric service, you can contact the PUCO's toll free call center at (800) 686-PUCO (7826). If warranted, the PUCO can ask for the company's records of outages in your area. At that point, the PUCO will choose the best course of action.