



Preparing for blackouts

Blackouts could be a possibility over winter. How to prepare and what to do if they happen:

1. Torches, not candles

Houses lit by candles is not the safest option. We recommend you keep some battery powered torches in an easy to find place so you can use them if the lights go out. Candles are a fire hazard and put unnecessary pressure on the emergency services who need to dedicate resources to the most vulnerable during blackouts.

2. Write down emergency numbers

Increasing reliance on smartphones and devices means you may not know your friends and family's phone numbers by heart. Keeping key contacts written down in an easily accessible place is important in case your phone runs out of battery. The national power cut helpline – 105 – is also worth noting down as it offers free 24/7 advice.

3. Keep phones charged

Although blackouts will cut off Wi-Fi, people will still be able to access the internet, send messages and make calls using 4G. Try not to let your phone battery run low – and invest in battery pack chargers to give you extra supply.

4. Boiled water in flasks

Investing in flasks so you can store boiled water and keep it hot is a good idea ahead of planned blackouts. Drinking hot water, tea or coffee is a good way to keep warm when the heating goes off.

5. Priority Services Register

People who are vulnerable, or look after elderly or disabled friends or relatives, can sign up for the Priority Services Register through their energy supplier. This means companies will be under an obligation to warn customers on the register in advance of any power cut and prioritise them when they are trying to reconnect power. You can be added to the register if you are of state pension age, disabled or have a long-term medical condition, are recovering from an injury, your vision or hearing is impaired, you have a mental health condition, are pregnant or have a child under five or you have difficulties speaking English.

6. Check on neighbours

The Grid has promised to warn people of blackouts at least a day beforehand, so if you have elderly or vulnerable neighbours, friends or relatives, pay them a visit to check they have everything they need to keep warm and safe when the lights go out. Inviting them to visit or stay on the day of the blackout may give you better peace of mind if you're particularly worried about someone and have the space.

During the blackout

The usual advice about how to deal with a tripped switch and resetting your fuse box won't apply in a planned blackout. Here's what you can do to stay safe and warm when the power goes off.

Stay at home

Arranging to be at home during the blackout hours will make things less stressful. Most businesses will have to close during power cuts but driving or being in a public space could leave you vulnerable.

Keep fridge doors shut

Food and drink should last in the fridge or freezer for a few hours with the doors kept closed, which means you shouldn't have to throw any food away after a three-hour blackout.

When getting things out of the fridge, do it quickly and remember to close the door immediately afterwards.

Dress up warm

Wear lots of layers and keep blankets in an easily accessible place. Hot water bottles, hand warmers and heat pads can all help to keep warm.

Unplug fish tank filters

Fish and reptiles that live in tanks will survive for a couple of hours without power. It's important to unplug fish tank filters, however, as this will stop harmful toxins entering the water.

Use the car

Cars can offer an emergency source of heating and electricity. Most cars have USB charging points if you need to charge a device but be careful not to do it for too long, as it will run the car battery flat without the engine on.

Leave a light on

Leaving a light switched on during the blackout will mean you know immediately when power is restored. But remember to turn appliances like irons and electric fires off in case they come back on unexpectedly and risk starting a fire.

Stair lifts

If you or a friend or relative rely on a stair lift, check if they have a manual handle or backup batteries. Those who have mobility problems are likely to be on the Priority Services Register, so will be eligible for extra support during the blackout.