

Tips for Seniors and People with Disabilities

Winter Preparedness



Now is a good time to consider some simple and easy steps to prepare for winter storms. A major storm can sometimes cut off your electrical power for long periods. With a little planning, you can reduce the disruptions winter storms can create. The more you can do, the more confident you will be about your safety and comfort.

To prepare for power outages:

1. Have a **battery-powered radio and flashlight and fresh batteries.**
2. Set up a **buddy system** with someone who can **check in with you** to make sure you have everything you need and help with personal tasks -- opening canned foods, running errands, contacting PG&E, etc.
3. Make sure you have a supply of **water** and ready to eat canned or dry **food** and a **manual can-opener**. Remember to store water and food for pets or service animals.
4. Clear **paths of travel** around your home. Even with a flashlight, the dark will impair your mobility.
5. **Personal care assistants.** Set up a back up plan with your primary care provider in the event that your personal attendant, or home health agency worker is unable to help you.
6. Check with your **local pharmacy** (if you use prescription medication) **and neighborhood grocery to see if they make deliveries.** During stormy weather, getting out of your home for a few days may be hard for you.
7. To keep warm during a power outage you will want to make sure you have **extra blankets** at home.
8. If you use a motorized wheelchair or scooter, consider having an **extra battery** or **manual wheelchair available.** In an emergency you may be able to substitute a car battery for a wheelchair battery. Keep **extra mobility aids** (e.g., canes, crutches and walkers) for other emergencies.
9. If you have an **electric garage door** know how to use the manual option. This requires pulling a short rope or chain at the top of the door. You may want a neighbor to help you if it requires a strong pull and if you need to lift and open the door manually.

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For People with Special Medical Needs:

1. Have at least a **three-day supply of your medications** with you. If you use oxygen, have an emergency supply (for three days or more).
2. For all medical equipment requiring electrical power, such as breathing equipment and infusion pumps, check with your medical supply company about a **backup power source**. This could include a battery pack or generator.
3. Check with the vendor to make sure that **backup generators are compatible** with your equipment. Also, check with PG&E to make sure you have properly installed the backup equipment.

What to do if the power is out:

1. Stay tuned to your local news stations for outage updates.
2. **PG&E's 24-hour, toll-free power outage hotline is 1-800-743-5002.** You can use this number to find out if an outage has been reported in your area and when power would be restored, to report an outage and ask for a call back when power returns, or to speak to a PG&E representative.

Some preparedness tips for homeowners:

1. Keep walkways and steps around your home clear of debris, so that you and other people will not slip when it gets wet.
2. Keep gutters on your roof clean. This helps prevent water from leaking into your house. The “gutters” and “roofing” sections of the yellow pages list companies that clean gutters. You can also get a recommendation from the Better Business Bureau (see below). The average gutter cleaning cost for a small single-story home starts at \$150.
3. This is a good time to have your **furnace and the hot water heater checked** and cleaned, if you can afford it. Heating contractors will charge from \$75 to \$100 to do this. As a free service, PG&E will come to your home and do a safety check of your furnace and hot water heater, and relite the pilot if necessary. Call PG&E at 1-800-743-5002.

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If you need more extensive home repair work:

If you experience serious leaking or flooding during heavy rains, your home may require more extensive repairs. If you hire a contractor to do this work, here are a few tips:

1. Deal only with **licensed contractors**; make sure the person you deal with has a contractor's license. Get **3 bids** on the work to be done.
2. Get a **written contract** that contains details of the job to be done. **Don't pay cash** and do not pay the full cost of the job up front.
3. Check your contractor with the Better Business Bureau (510)-238-1000 the Associated Roofing Contractors, of the Bay Area at (510) 635-8800 or the Contractors State License Board at 800-321-2752.