

Power Outage Safety Tips

As we continue to see temperatures rise around the world, the strain on the electrical grid is causing higher demand on the production of electricity. Now communities are facing brownouts and blackouts every summer.

For most organizations, a power outage in the workplace can create a huge drain on productivity. In addition to power outage safety concerns, outages mean lost time and lost productivity. Luckily, with a few basic power outage tips, you can minimize the impact of when the power goes out.

PREPARE YOUR WORKPLACE FOR A POWER OUTAGE

Knowing what to do during a power outage at work is key to keeping your employees and those you serve safe. An outage also means no internet—and not being able to respond to email and phone calls in a timely fashion.

In fact, weather-related outages have doubled since 2003, and have caused thousands of American organizations loss of productivity. In the worst-case scenario, a longer-term outage could force you to close your organization entirely. Therefore, to safely deal with a power outage in the workplace, you need a plan in place ahead of time.

HAVE A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

When the power outage occurs, landline phone systems can fail as well. With Titan HST, you can still communicate with your organization via mobile app to keep your employees and stakeholders informed and safe. Include power outage procedures in your emergency management plan and in your Titan HST file repository.

TIPS TO GET STARTED!

It may sound intimidating to have to create power outage procedures from scratch! However, these 15 tips will help you to get back in business quickly.

WHAT TO DO *BEFORE* A WORKPLACE POWER OUTAGE

- 1. Have a plan for your organization during a power outage.** Do your employees know what to do in a power outage at work? When the lights go out, a power outage emergency response plan will not only keep your employees and those you serve safe, it also protects your appliances and equipment from damage.
- 2. Make sure your employees (and stakeholders) are safe.** Caution your stakeholders and employees to avoid elevators or escalators and use stairs. Keep a safe water kit on hand in case the tap water at your business is no longer potable. Consider creating a Preset Broadcast Message outlining employee instructions in the event of a power outage.
- 3. Have an emergency kit accessible for you and your employees.** Every organization should keep on hand a kit stocked with emergency water, first aid supplies, flashlights, rope or twine, and other basic items. It should be kept in an easy-to-reach place and employees should be trained on where it is and how to use it
- 4. Check your backup systems in case of a power failure.** During an outage, building safety systems such as smoke alarms, sprinklers, and illuminated exit signs need a way to remain powered, so consider investing in safety systems that have a battery-backup option.
- 5. Know how to safely operate your generator.** With a generator, you can continue to run critical aspects of your organization during a power outage, but they must be operated safely. Generators need to be used with adequate ventilation to avoid the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Never plug generators directly into power outlets, as this can injure utility workers. Never use a generator under wet conditions, and always let the generator cool off before refueling.
- 6. Invest in surge protection for your equipment.** Surge protectors keep your inner building equipment, such as computers, laptops, and tv's from malfunctioning when there is a sudden change in voltage. During a storm or power outage, the risk is especially high. The cost of surge protection equipment is far less than the cost of replacing damaged computers or manufacturing equipment.
- 7. Understand the difference between a blackout and a brownout.** Not all outages are created equal, so you should know the difference between a brownout vs. a blackout. A *brownout* is a temporary reduction in your power system's overall capacity, whereas a *blackout* occurs when the system goes out entirely. For more ideas on power outage safety, visit Ready.gov.

WHAT TO DO *DURING* A WORKPLACE POWER OUTAGE

- 8. Call your local utility company and report the power outage,** (call 911 ONLY in case of immediate danger). Immediately after an outage, your utility provider needs to know when and where it occurred. Use your utility's designated line to report a power outage and let them know if you are aware of downed power lines or other hazards. This is one of the critical power outage procedures for businesses, as it allows the utility to respond as quickly as possible to any dangers.
- 9. Call 911 only if people are in immediate danger, as this line is for life-threatening emergencies only.** If nearby power lines are physically down, make sure you do not approach or drive over them.
- 10. Turn off and disconnect equipment to prevent damage.** During an outage, electrical surges can damage equipment and create a fire risk. Turn off and completely disconnect all your large appliances, assembly lines, and other equipment so that nothing is damaged. This is another of the most important power outage procedures for organizations—after all, you can't keep your doors open without the equipment your company relies on.
- 11. Use MiFi devices to complete critical operations.** The importance of paperless document storage might only be obvious when it's too late and your organization's data is already lost. Don't let this happen to you! Plan to use a cloud server. You should also prepare a system of personal wireless hotspots, or MiFi devices, so that even when the internet goes down, you can finish important tasks requiring web access, such as setting up an email auto-response. The Titan HST file repository also allows you to store site files and download them for access even if you are offline from cellular connections.
- 12. Keep doors closed on refrigeration equipment until power is restored.** When the power goes out, food safety is imperative. Keep a thermometer inside all refrigerators: if the temperature rises above 40 degrees Fahrenheit, perishables are no longer safe. Keep refrigerator doors closed to prevent cooled air from escaping. For longer-term outages, coolers loaded with dry ice can maintain a safe temperature for food.

WHAT TO DO AFTER A WORKPLACE POWER OUTAGE

13. Confirm that power is restored for your organization before resuming operation.

When power is restored, major appliances and equipment still may not be safe to use. Test power by turning on a light first. Then, only turn major equipment back on after 10 to 15 minutes.

14. Check the equipment and appliances for damage. Inspect your business equipment for any damage before resuming operation. Look especially closely at plugs and other electronic inputs. Keep an eye out for exposed or loose wiring.

15. Turn off your generator in a safe way. Make sure both you and your employees know how to safely turn off and store your generator. To avoid causing electrocution and equipment damage, generators need to be turned off using a specific process. For instance, don't forget to turn off before unplugging all equipment your generator is powering.

Tally your losses and recover your organization. Understanding how much your organization lost and determining what changes to make so that you reduce losses during future outages. Be sure to review your insurance coverage and follow the correct procedures for initiating any claims. Losses can also be intangible, so take the proper steps to recover important data after an outage.

REFERENCES:

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