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No power? No problem. Here's how you can keep surfing the internet



Scott Orr Mar 15, 2020

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When the power goes out — whether it's severe weather, a transformer malfunction or even [a wayward squirrel](#) — your internet-connected devices can be out of business for the outage duration.

Power companies strive to keep their customers' electricity on all the paths to some outages can result in homes and businesses being in the dark for hours.

How much trouble it causes you depends on how much of your life is tied to the [internet and online services](#).

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Possible impacts

At home, a disruption in the power supply used to mean lighting of candles (no longer recommended in any case, due to the risk of fire), turning on flashlights, opening or closing windows and waiting it out. In our interconnected world, however, we demand more than light.

Let's look at the affected technology:

Internet delivered via cable or fiber should, in most cases, be available, because even if your internet service provider (ISP) suffers a power outage, they have backup generators. Other technology along the line is usually — but not always — backed-up by batteries. If not, you won't have a connection. Internet service delivered by [DSL](#) will usually still work. [Satellite internet](#) will not be affected, nor will dial-up connections.

Assuming your home is still connected to the internet, the next link is your modem, which needs power, followed by the Wi-Fi router, which also requires juice.

Now we come to the stuff people usually think about: the computer, printer, speakers, gaming console and so on. Laptops with charged batteries will work, as will

tablets and smartphones, so long as the cell towers to which

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Some... juice too, and it can be a real power hog.

Clearly, when the electric company fails, your online activities can be heavily impacted, too.

Solutions

The viable solutions depend on the length of the service disruption.

If it's a short time, say, less than an hour, then having all your tech on a [UPS \(uninterruptible power supply\)](#) may be enough. This is essentially a backup battery system that charges while the power is on and goes to work when it's cut off. Many are intended only to keep a computer working long enough to save your work; longer run times require a more expensive UPS.

Extended blackouts may mean you'll need [a generator](#), which, if you have enough fuel, could, theoretically, keep you going indefinitely. A major consideration here is the output of the generator which may also have to supply other household appliances, such as a refrigerator and/or freezer.

If you still have wireless phone service, which is likely, as providers have their own backup generators, and assuming you have a charged battery, or extras ready for use, smartphones can be used to tether a laptop (otherwise known as using it as a "hotspot") and give the laptop access to the internet. Your wireless provider must support tethering and they typically limit the amount of bandwidth you can use for it. Remember, you'll be using data, not Wi-Fi, so it could get pricey if you don't have an unlimited plan.

Use a mobile broadband device. This works like tethering. **Call (855) 379-9547 to order** a dedicated device. You can buy a prepaid plan with Verizon, for example, for its [4G LTE Jetpack](#). Other wireless services, like [AT&T](#), also offer them. The device itself will run you about \$100 to buy outright or can be billed monthly.

Be ready

When the lights go out, it's not the time to consider your options. Instead:

Have on hand, and have charged and ready, outboard batteries for your smartphone. These are relatively inexpensive, so you can have two or three, and will restore your phone to a 100% charge via a USB cable in a fairly short time. [Amazon](#) is a good source for many varieties of these.

Have your laptop charged, and, if you absolutely must have it working, invest in — and keep charged — extra batteries for it as well.

Consider [purchasing a UPS](#) if your work is critical; it can also help in cases of brownouts which may cause a loss of data.

Give some thought to buying a mobile broadband device if you're concerned that you may need to use tethered laptops during a power outage.

What if the cable company fails?

If the cause of the service outage is not a lack of power, but damage to the cable companies' fiber lines, you'll have

to rely on tethering. In February 2020, Spectrum
customers **Call (855) 379-9547 to order** an ice
storm that /
offered credits to those affected, if they planned on relying
on a generator to keep them online, they were out of luck.

A final note about tethering: it only works if the cell towers
you're accessing have power. That's normally not a
problem, but if the outage is caused by severe weather
(for example, a hurricane or blizzard), the towers'
generators could run out of fuel. Until they are
replenished, those towers will be out of business — and so
will you.

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Last updated: Mar 11, 2020

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