

## In The Dark

In August 2003, the “lights went out”. In the initial hours of the blackout in August 2003, a great deal was unknown as to when power would be restored or what the cause had been. What was known was that the power outage was extensive, including much of the Canada – United States Eastern Seaboard. For those of us in Leeds and Grenville it seemed reminiscent of Ice Storm 1998, albeit a bit warmer. Ice Storm 1998 left our community “more prepared” for the power outages of the future. Many residents have since equipped their homes with back up alternatives for power or heat, or at least thought about a contingency plan (i.e. go to family or friends homes).

The most difficult part about dealing with a power outage is that it is out of our control, and there is often no definitive time at which the power is expected to return. Initially during a power outage, most people are frustrated by the inconvenience of the situation, but soon after people will need to utilize their coping skills. Communities like Leeds and Grenville, who have experienced similar scenarios in the past, are generally more prepared and experience less stress over the situation. While this is a positive attribute of our community, it is very important to not become complacent in the adage “been there, done that” as every emergency situation will be different and compounded by other factors, that are always unknown. Below are some general suggestions and ideas to help prepare and cope during power outages:

- Keep an extra supply of batteries to power radios and flashlights
- Purchase a rechargeable flashlight, it stays plugged into an outlet and turns on automatically during a power outage
- If your secondary source of heat is wood, ensure that you have an extra supply on hand and that the chimney is clean and clear
- Keep a supply of non-perishable food items on hand
- If you need to use candles, put hot pads underneath the base, it is preferable to use candleholders that enclose the flame (i.e. glass chimney)
- Unplug appliances to protect against possible power surges and minimize risk of fire, in the case of heat producing appliances that may have been “on” prior to the outage. This will also help reduce initial demand when power is re-connected
- Limit the number of times that the fridge and freezer are opened to help keep items cold / frozen
- Keep a Ziploc bag of ice cubes in the freezer. If after the power outage, the ice cubes have melted and re-frozen, this will be a good indicator that the food within the freezer has also thawed and may not be safe for consumption.
- A hidden source of water in an power outage is the hot water tank, make sure to turn of the gas or electricity to the tank and open the drain at the bottom of the tank
- If considering the purchase of a generator, it is advised to consult with an electrician regarding the required capacity. Ideally a permanent connection for the generator should be completed by an electrician prior to an actual emergency
- Prepare a 72 hour emergency survival kit, including such items as: bottled water (4 litres/ per person/ per day), blankets, non perishable food items (5 day supply),

a supply of pet food, blankets, sleeping bag(s), matches, formula, diapers, rainwear, mitts & hat, copies of important documents, etc.

A unique family activity is to have a “no power” night or “camp time”. A specific evening is selected for the event, in which the basic rule is “no power”. Dinner is prepared without the use of electricity which may include an outside BBQ. There is no computer, no lights, and no TV. Alternative activities may include board games, crafts, painting, books, an evening walk to look at the stars, charades or cards. It can become a weekly or monthly family activity. This type of activity should be modified to best accommodate what the individual family is comfortable with. This activity is best done with children 4 years of age and older. This is not only a great opportunity for quality family time, but it also helps children to have less anxiety during an actual power outage.

To obtain additional information or pamphlets on Power Outages or Emergency Planning and Preparedness, contact your local Township / Municipality or the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville at 613-345-4101 ext#12327.

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