

Shedding Light on Power Outages

Here are answers to some of the most common outage questions we get.

What are the most common causes of power outages?

Everything from weather, animals, equipment malfunction, and emergencies can trigger a power outage. Some outages are planned in advance when crews need to perform upgrades and repairs.

Car-pole accidents, lightning, high winds, winter storms – whatever the cause, we do our best to restore power as quickly as possible.

Why do my neighbors sometimes have power during an outage when I don't?

Many factors can cause this situation. Your neighbor may be on a different circuit, or there may be trouble just on the portion supplying your immediate area. The cause of the outage may be isolated to one transformer or a group of transformers, or the problem may affect only the power line connecting to your home.

What if I only have electricity in part of my house?

Power is distributed in your house through a piece of electrical equipment called the service panel. From your home's service panel, electricity is routed through individual circuits to different parts of the house. Each circuit is protected by a circuit breaker or fuse. When you have power in some circuits but not others, the first thing you should check is whether a circuit breaker has tripped or a fuse is blown.

You may find a tripped circuit breaker or a blown fuse in the service panel that you can easily reset or replace to restore service to the rest of the house. However, it is possible to have a problem with the service wire that connects between the transformer and the customer residence, such as a bad connector or a broken wire.



Damage to these leads sometimes leaves only the 120-volt outlets (or some of them) working. In this case, larger appliances that need 240-volt service (such as water heaters, clothes dryers and ovens) may be inoperable until repairs are made. If there is a problem with the service lead to your home, our crews will repair the wires when they arrive to restore service.

Why can't you tell me exactly when my power will be restored?

As a general rule, we don't make predictions when power will be restored to a specific location. Widespread damage from a storm may make it impossible to accurately predict when a particular customer's power will be restored – especially in the early phases of an outage when the extent of the damage is being assessed. Once the extent of damage is understood, restoration times are affected by the degree of damage to our facilities.

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High-voltage distribution lines are given first priority because they supply electricity to the entire distribution system. Substations are repaired next in order to energize local distribution lines. A distribution line serving a local area may have multiple damaged locations, all of which must be found and repaired. Restoration priorities are given to hospitals, schools, fallen power lines where life is in danger, and to where fire or other emergency agencies are standing by fallen power lines. All of these factors affect our ability to predict when a specific customer's power will be restored.

Of course, ongoing weather conditions during a storm can also be a factor. It's not uncommon during big wind storms that just about the time we get a customer's power restored, a new wind gust will blow through and create new outages. That's why it is very difficult to accurately predict when a particular customer's power will be restored.

Why did my power come back on, then go off again a few minutes later?

Restoring power to your home is a complex and dangerous job. Sometimes, after a power line is repaired in one location, other damage can cause the line to go out again. At other times, it may be necessary to turn off your power once more to safely repair other problems. In any case, our crews work to restore your power again as soon and as safely possible.

If the power goes out, do I need to throw out all the food in my refrigerator and freezer?

Try to leave the refrigerator or freezer doors closed during a power outage. If the doors remain closed, refrigerated food can stay cool for about six to nine hours. Frozen food can remain safe for up to 24 hours.

What are the priorities for service restoration?

The PUD follows a defined set of priorities in restoring power. First, we will work around the clock during major storms to restore service as quickly as possible. The safety of our employees and the public are our highest priorities.

After safety concerns, first to be restored are outages that affect 115 kilovolt (kV) facilities, which provide power to substations that serve residential customers, hospitals, schools or large businesses. Following in descending order are substation circuit breaker outages,

fallen primary lines, transformer malfunctions, fallen service wires, and finally nonessential street lights.

In a major storm, it's always critical for the PUD to restore electricity to hospitals, schools and other vital public services as quickly as possible. At the same time, we must be certain that all real and potential hazards to the public – such as snapped or leaning utility poles, uprooted trees on the electric lines or fallen wires – are cleared.

Why does it seem to take so long to restore my power?

When damage is widespread – such as during a severe storm – it's impossible to restore electric service to everyone at the same time. We have over 340,000 customers, and our service area consists of over 2,200 square miles. In such cases, we give priority to safety concerns and vital community services. Then we make repairs to electrical facilities that will return service to the largest number of customers in the shortest period of time. Sometimes your circuit may be among the first repaired, and other times it may take longer. When there is a delay in restoring your power, we appreciate your patience.

Why did a service truck go through my neighborhood without stopping to restore my power?

Our service crews must first tackle public safety hazards and make repairs that restore power to critical community services (hospitals, fire departments, police stations, etc). A truck may have passed your home on the way to one of these high-priority assignments. Or, you may have seen a serviceman patrolling the circuit to determine the cause of an outage. If the repair is bigger than what a serviceman can safely repair, a crew and necessary equipment will be called in to make repairs.

Want to create your own emergency preparedness kit to help you get through for future long outages? Visit **snopud.com/winterprep** to find a list of what you should include in your kit.

