



An Extended Guide · No. 1789

No Generator? No Problem

Protect your food with
no backup power at all

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! Read this first — when in doubt, throw it out

Here is the one rule that keeps your family safe when the power goes out: when in doubt, throw it out. Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors shut, and know the clock — a closed refrigerator keeps food safe for about 4 hours, and a full freezer holds its cold for about 48 hours (about 24 hours if it is only half full). Any perishable food — meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk, soft cheese, cut fruit, and leftovers — that has been above 40 degrees Fahrenheit for 2 hours or more should be thrown out. Never taste food to decide whether it is safe; many of the germs that cause food poisoning leave no smell, taste, or change you can see. Most people have no generator, and for most outages, you truly don't need one.

No generator, no battery station, no problem

For the great majority of power outages, a home with no backup power at all comes through just fine — if you know a few simple habits and use them right away.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. I hear from a lot of folks who feel like they need to rush out and buy a generator the moment the power blinks. Most of the time, that's simply not true.

This guide is the plan for exactly your situation: no generator, no battery station, just the doors, the clock, a cooler, and a little ice. Used well, that combination protects your food through the outages most homes actually see.

★ Wondering if you need backup power at all?

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042. I talk with folks about this all the time, and plenty of homes never need a generator or battery station. If yours might, I'm glad to help you think it through — no pressure, nothing to sell.

The whole plan, on one page

If you only read one page of this guide, make it this one.

- ❑ Lean on the hold-times: a closed fridge is good for about 4 hours, a full freezer about 48.
- ❑ Keep the doors shut. It costs nothing, and it's your best tool by far.
- ❑ After about 4 hours, move fridge perishables into a cooler packed with ice.
- ❑ Make ice and freeze water jugs ahead of time, whenever you see a storm coming.
- ❑ Keep the freezer full — a full one holds cold about twice as long as a half-empty one.
- ❑ If the outage runs long, get ice from a store in a town that still has power.
- ❑ When in doubt, throw it out.

✓ No generator doesn't mean no plan

Every item on this list is free or nearly free, and none of it needs a drop of gasoline or a single battery. That's the whole idea behind this guide.

The hold-times cover most outages by themselves

Before you think about coolers or ice, know this: your fridge and freezer are tougher than most people expect.

A closed refrigerator keeps food safe for about 4 hours. A full freezer holds safe temperatures for about 48 hours, closed the whole time — a half-full one, about 24. Most power outages, especially around here, are shorter than that.

Appliance (Doors Closed)	Stays Safe For About
Refrigerator	4 hours
Full freezer	48 hours
Half-full freezer	24 hours

✓ **Write down when the power went out**

A sticky note with the exact time turns these hold-times from a guess into a fact — especially useful later if you need to decide what to keep.

Your number-one free tool

With no generator running, this one habit does more work than anything else in the house.

Every time a door opens, the cold air that took hours to build spills out, and warm air rushes in to replace it. Do that often enough and a fridge that should have lasted most of a day is in trouble by lunchtime.

Agree with everyone in the house ahead of time: open a door only when you truly need something, know what you want before you open it, and grab it fast. Every peek costs cold you can't easily get back.

- Decide what you need before you're standing in front of the door.
- Keep a small cooler of ice nearby for drinks and snacks, so the fridge stays shut.
- Tape a reminder note to the door if grandkids or houseguests are around.
- Group items you'll want together, so one quick open covers more ground.

✓ A full fridge and freezer both hold cold better

If either one is looking bare, fill the empty space with jugs of water. More cold mass means more time before anything warms up.

When the fridge clock runs out, the cooler takes over

This is the heart of a no-generator plan: a cooler and ice pick up right where the fridge's 4 hours leave off.

After about 4 hours — or right away if you already have ice ready — move the most perishable items from the fridge into a cooler packed with ice: meat, milk, eggs, leftovers, anything soft or cut. Keep that cooler at 40 degrees or below.

A cooler with ice can hold food safely far longer than an open or warming fridge, and it costs nothing but the ice itself. It's the single most useful piece of no-backup-power gear in the house.

- Keep a thermometer in the cooler too, and add ice as needed to stay at 40 or below.
- Pack the cooler snugly — a full cooler holds cold longer than a half-empty one.
- Keep it in the coolest, shadiest spot you have, away from sunny windows.
- A mix of block ice and cubes cools fast and lasts — more on that next.

! Never guess — use the thermometer

Keep the cooler at 40 degrees or below, checked with a thermometer, not by touch. That number is what actually keeps food safe.

Free ice, made before you need it

You don't have to buy ice for a no-generator plan. You can make it for free, days or weeks ahead of any outage.

Fill clean jugs, freezer bags, or tubs with water and freeze them solid, leaving a little room at the top for the water to expand. Tuck them into any empty space in the freezer, and they do double duty: they help the freezer run fuller and colder, and they become instant ice for a cooler when you need it.

Plastic containers only — never glass, which can crack as the water freezes and expands. Whenever a storm is in the forecast, freezing a few more jugs is one of the best five minutes you can spend.

✓ The full details are in a guide of their own

I've written a whole separate guide on the water-jug trick — why it works and how to use it best. Worth a look if this idea is new to you.

Why a full freezer is worth protecting

One fact does more for a no-generator plan than almost anything else: a full freezer holds its cold roughly twice as long as a half-empty one.

A packed freezer can hold safe temperatures for about 48 hours with the door closed, versus about 24 for one that's only half full. All that frozen food works together like a big block of ice, helping everything around it stay cold.

So before an outage ever happens, look at your freezer. If there's open space, fill it — with food you'll actually eat, or with the frozen water jugs from the last page. Either way, a full freezer is free insurance.

✓ Pack it, don't just fill it

Leave a little airflow, but pack items close together. A tightly packed freezer holds cold better than one with food scattered loosely around empty space.

When you need more ice than you have

If an outage runs longer than your ice on hand can cover, remember that outages are often local — power may still be on just a short drive away.

A store, gas station, or convenience mart a town over may still have power and ice for sale, even while your street is dark. It's worth a phone call to a friend or relative nearby to check before you drive.

Keep this in mind before the outage even starts: know which coolers you'd load up, and keep your car reasonably ready for an ice run so you're not scrambling for gas or supplies at the same time you're trying to save the freezer.

- Call ahead if you can — a neighbor or relative in a powered area can confirm a store is open.
- Bring enough coolers to bring home more than you think you'll need.
- Combine an ice run with any other errands, so you're not making multiple trips.
- Block ice lasts longer for the drive home; cubes fill in the gaps once you're back.

★ Not sure how far to drive?

If you're trying to decide whether an ice run is worth it versus waiting it out, call me at (330) 200-8042. I can help you weigh the drive against how much time your freezer really has left.

Dry ice: a bigger tool for a bigger outage

If you have a large freezer full of valuable food and the outage is stretching on, dry ice is worth considering.

Dry ice is frozen carbon dioxide, and it's extremely cold — cold enough to demand careful handling. Only touch it with insulated gloves, never bare skin, and use it only in a ventilated space; as it turns to gas it releases carbon dioxide, which can build up and displace breathable air in a closed car or small room.

Never seal dry ice in an airtight container — the building pressure can burst it. Put a layer of cardboard or newspaper between the dry ice and your food, and place it on top of the food in a chest freezer or cooler, since cold sinks downward on its own.

- Ask your dry-ice supplier how much you need and how long it will last for your freezer — amounts vary too much to guess.
- Handle it only with insulated gloves.
- Use it only where fresh air can get in.
- Keep it away from an airtight seal, and keep a barrier between it and your food.

✓ There's a full guide on this

Dry ice is a great tool once you know the handling rules. I've written a separate guide devoted just to using it safely in a freezer — read that before your first time.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

A no-generator plan looks a little different depending on where you live and what you're protecting.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, outages tend to be shorter, and help is usually close by. A cooler packed with ice plus a quick run to a store that still has power will usually cover the whole outage with room to spare.

- Shorter typical outages mean the 4-hour and 48-hour hold-times often do most of the work on their own.
- A nearby store or gas station is an easy backup source for ice if you run low.
- You likely have just one fridge and maybe one freezer, which keeps the plan simple.
- A couple of coolers and a stash of frozen jugs is usually plenty of no-backup gear.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country on a private well, outages often run longer, and there's usually more food at stake — a big chest freezer of garden produce or meat is common. Remember that your well pump has no backup power either, so it shares this same no-generator challenge as the fridge.

- A bigger freezer holds more food, and more value, so know what's most important to protect first.
- Longer outages mean a longer drive for ice — plan the trip and the coolers ahead of time.
- With no pump running, keep some water stored for drinking, cooking, and topping off a cooler with ice.
- A backup thermometer in every unit is cheap peace of mind, especially in an unheated garage or barn.

★ Not sure which of these sounds like you?

Plenty of homes are a mix of both. Tell me what you're protecting and how long your outages usually run, and I'll help you build a plan that fits — no generator required. Call (330) 200-8042.

When a friend's fridge is your best backup

With no generator or battery station of your own, someone else's power can be the simplest answer.

If a friend, neighbor, or relative nearby still has power, ask if you can bring over your most valuable or perishable food — a bag of meat, refrigerated medicine, the leftovers you can't bear to lose. A working fridge or freezer a few miles away is backup power you didn't have to buy.

This works best when you plan it before an outage, not during one. Have a rough idea of who you'd call, and keep a cooler or two ready to make the trip so the food stays safe along the way.

✓ Pack the cooler for the drive, too

Even a short car ride is a chance for food to warm up. Pack it in a cooler with ice for the trip, the same as you would at home.

With no backup power, the clock and thermometer decide everything

Without a generator to fall back on, the 2-hour rule becomes the single most important number in this whole guide.

Any perishable food — meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk, soft cheese, cut fruit or vegetables, cooked leftovers — that has sat above 40 degrees for 2 hours or more should be thrown out. Not tasted, not sniffed, not 'probably fine.' Thrown out.

In a closed fridge, you have a comfortable cushion, since it holds below 40 degrees for about 4 hours on its own. It's only once food actually warms past 40 degrees that the 2-hour count begins — which is exactly why the doors-shut habit and the cooler plan both matter so much.

- The clock counts time spent above 40 degrees, not time since the power went out.
- A closed fridge buys roughly 4 hours before it even crosses that line.
- A cooler of ice can hold food below 40 degrees far longer than the fridge alone.
- When you can't tell how long something's been warm, treat it as unsafe.

! When in doubt, throw it out

With no backup power, there's no way to un-warm food that's crossed the line. A tossed meal is a small loss; food poisoning is not.

A plan for refrigerated medicine, too

Food isn't the only thing in the fridge that matters — refrigerated medicine deserves its own no-generator plan.

If you or someone in your home keeps refrigerated medicine — insulin is the one I hear about most — a cooler with ice is a sensible backup, the same as it is for food. Many such medicines can tolerate some time at room temperature, but the details vary by medicine, so this is a question for your pharmacist or doctor, not a general guide like this one.

Ask them ahead of time what to do for that specific medicine in an outage, and keep a cooler and ice ready so you're not figuring it out for the first time under stress. Avoid letting insulin freeze, too — it can be damaged by cold just as much as by heat.

! Medicine questions go to your pharmacist

I can help you set up a cooler and a thermometer, but I'm not a medical professional. For whether a specific medicine is still good, please call your pharmacist or doctor — they know your situation.

You don't have to solve this alone

A no-generator plan doesn't mean a no-help plan. Neighbors and your community are part of the plan too.

A neighbor with a generator may be glad to hold a cooler's worth of your most valuable food in their own running fridge for a few hours. It costs you a conversation, and small-town habits tend to make that an easy one to have.

During a bigger or longer outage, keep an ear out for a warming or cooling center opened by the township, the county, or a local relief organization — they sometimes have space to store medicine or ice to share. Local radio, your utility's alerts, and neighbors are usually the fastest way to hear about one.

★ Building a small neighbor network

It's worth a friendly conversation before the next outage: who has a generator, who's on a well, who might need a hand. I'm always glad to help a street or a few families think this through together. Call (330) 200-8042.

What to actually do while the power is out

When it's really happening, it helps to have the order of operations already in your head.

- ❑ Write down the time the power went out.
- ❑ Keep the fridge and freezer doors closed from this point on.
- ❑ Check your appliance thermometers before opening anything wide.
- ❑ After about 4 hours, move fridge perishables into an iced cooler.
- ❑ If the outage is running long, plan an ice run or consider dry ice for the freezer.
- ❑ Use the thermometer and the 2-hour rule — not your nose — to decide what to keep.
- ❑ When in doubt about any food, throw it out.

★ Talk it through with me, mid-outage

If the power's out right now and you're not sure what to do next, call or text me at (330) 200-8042. I can walk you through it in a few minutes, no charge and no judgment.

The power's back — now what

The moment the lights flicker back on isn't quite the moment to relax about the fridge and freezer.

Check your thermometers before assuming anything is safe just because the power's back. If the fridge stayed at or below 40 degrees, its food is fine. If freezer food still has ice crystals or reads 40 degrees or below, it's safe to refreeze or cook.

If anything sat above 40 degrees for 2 hours or more, follow the 2-hour rule and let it go. I've put together a full after-outage checklist guide that walks through this step by step — worth keeping alongside this one.

✓ Refill your freeze-ahead jugs

Once things are back to normal, refill and refreeze any water jugs you used. Future-you, in the next outage, will be glad they're ready and waiting.

Common mistakes people make with no backup power

A few avoidable slip-ups explain most of the food that gets tossed unnecessarily — or eaten when it shouldn't be.

- **Opening the doors 'just to check'**, which drains the cold faster than anything else.
- **Having no ice ready** when the fridge clock runs out, instead of freezing jugs ahead of time.
- **Leaving the freezer half empty**, when a few frozen jugs would have doubled its cold hours.
- **Guessing instead of using a thermometer**, especially once the power's been out for hours.
- **Waiting too long to move food to a cooler**, past the point where the fridge can still protect it.

! The costliest mistake is the confident guess

Almost every food-poisoning case I hear about starts with someone feeling sure a food was 'probably okay.' With no backup power, the clock and thermometer are what you have — lean on them.

If this keeps happening, there's a next step

Everything so far needs no generator and no battery — and for most homes, that's the whole plan. But it's worth knowing what comes next if outages start piling up.

If your outages are rare and short, the habits in this guide are probably all you'll ever need. But if you find yourself running the cooler-and-ice routine several times a year, it may be worth considering a little help.

There's no rush and no pressure here. Plenty of homes never take this step, and that's perfectly fine — it's just worth knowing the option exists for whenever, if ever, it starts to make sense for your home.

✓ A battery power station is safe to use indoors

Unlike a gas generator, a battery or solar power station makes no exhaust and no carbon monoxide, so it is safe to run inside the house right next to the refrigerator. A gas generator is the opposite — it must always run outdoors, well away from doors, windows, and vents.

Everything a no-backup plan needs, in one small kit

None of this requires a generator, a battery station, or a big budget — just a few inexpensive things kept ready in one place.

- One or two coolers, sized for your household's most perishable food.
- An appliance thermometer for the fridge and one for the freezer.
- A few frozen water jugs, refrozen after every use.
- A bag or two of ice on hand, or a plan for where to buy more.
- A sticky note and pen, just for writing down the time the power went out.
- My number, somewhere you'll actually see it.

★ Keep my number in the kit, too

Tape (330) 200-8042 right on the cooler or the fridge. If you're ever unsure what to do, a quick call costs you nothing.

Print this page and stick it on the fridge

Keep this where you'll actually see it during an outage — the fridge door isn't a bad choice.

- ☐ Keep the doors shut. Open only when you must, and be quick.
- ☐ After about 4 hours, move fridge perishables to an iced cooler.
- ☐ Keep the freezer full — it holds cold about twice as long that way.
- ☐ Outage running long? Get more ice from a store that still has power.
- ☐ When in doubt, throw it out.

★ Keep my number nearby too

Tape my number right next to this checklist: (330) 200-8042. If you're ever unsure, a quick call costs you nothing.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most often from folks with no generator and no battery station.

Q: Do I really not need a generator?

For most outages, that's right. Keeping the doors closed, leaning on the hold-times, and having a cooler and ice ready covers the great majority of outages most homes see.

Q: How long can I really go with just a cooler?

A cooler packed with ice and kept at 40 degrees or below can hold food safely for a good while, especially if you keep adding ice. Check it with a thermometer rather than a clock alone.

Q: Where do I get ice in the middle of an outage?

Try a store, gas station, or convenience mart in a town that still has power — outages are often local, so power may be back on just a short drive away.

Q: What if the outage lasts more than a day?

Lean harder on the freezer's 48-hour hold-time, restock your cooler with ice, and consider dry ice for a big freezer or asking a friend with power to hold your most valuable food.

Q: Should I just buy a battery station to be safe?

Only if it makes sense for you — mainly if your outages are frequent. For most homes, the free and cheap habits in this guide are plenty.

★ Still have a question?

No-generator planning is one of the most common conversations I have. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 any time.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made protecting your food without backup power feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

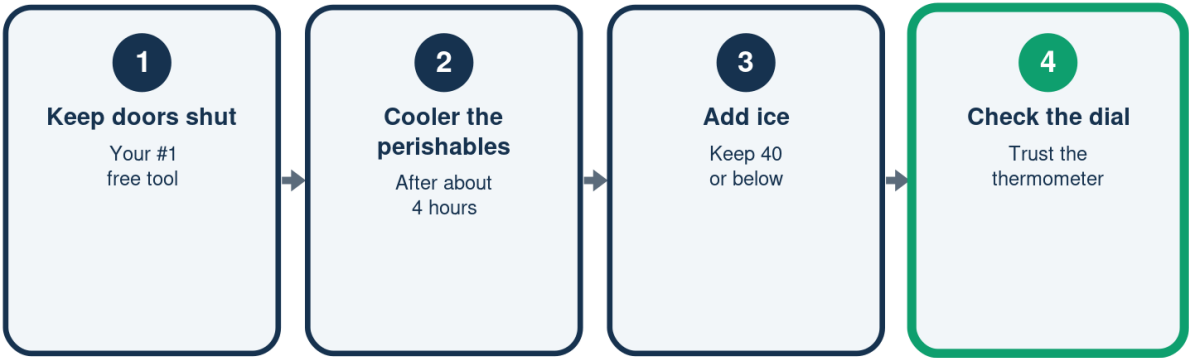
When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do the licensed electrical or gas work myself — for that I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

No-Backup Outage Plan

Free and cheap tools



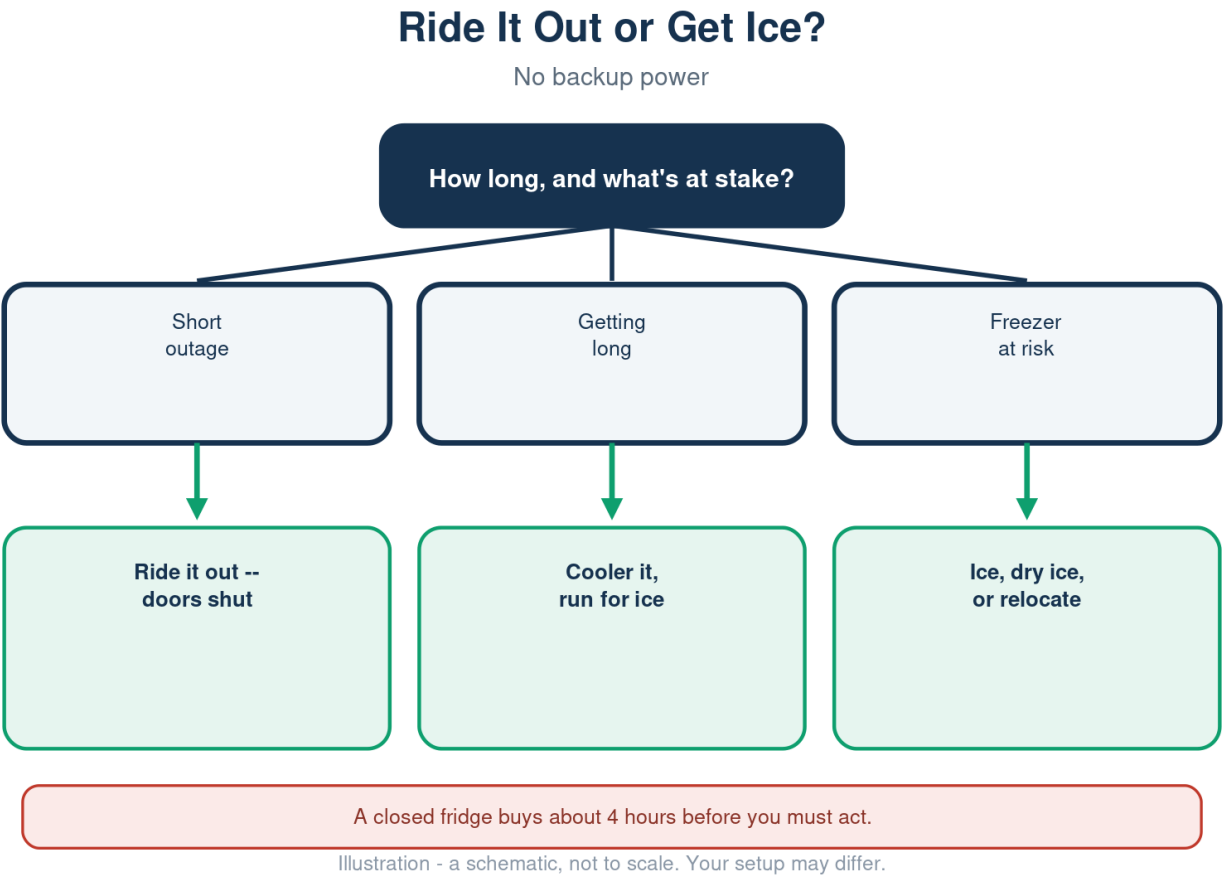
Most outages need nothing more than this.

Free and Cheap Tools

No generator required

Tool		Cost
Closed doors	Buys ~4-48 hrs	Free
Water jugs	Fill the freezer	Cheap
Cooler + ice	Bridge the gap	Cheap
Thermometer	Tells the truth	Cheap

You can protect your food for very little.



How Long You've Got

Doors closed the whole time

	Holds For	Then
Refrigerator	About 4 hours	Cooler it
Full freezer	About 48 hours	Ice/relocate
Half freezer	About 24 hours	Act sooner
Cooler at 40	Longer still	Add ice

When in doubt, throw it out.



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

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— *Bill*



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