



An Extended Guide · No. 1787

Getting Ready Before a Storm

An hour of prep buys
real hours later

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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. A little prep the day before a storm can double how long your food lasts.

When you see a storm coming, a little prep pays off big

An hour of prep before the weather turns can buy you real hours later, if the power does go out.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. When there's a storm in the forecast, I'd rather get a call two days ahead than during the outage itself — because the things that help most only work if you do them before the lights go out.

None of this is complicated or expensive. It's mostly about starting colder, filling empty space with ice, and having a cooler ready to go, so if the power does quit, you're already ahead of the clock instead of scrambling around in the dark.

★ Storm in the forecast this week?

If you want to talk through your setup before it hits — one fridge or several, a generator or not — call or text me at (330) 200-8042. I'm glad to help you get ready.

The whole guide, on one page

If a storm's rolling in and you only have a few minutes, do these.

- ❑ Turn the fridge and freezer a notch colder than usual.
- ❑ Freeze water jugs and gel packs for a supply of free cold blocks.
- ❑ Make or buy ice, and get a cooler pre-chilled and ready to go.
- ❑ Fill any empty freezer space with frozen jugs.
- ❑ Group your food so a single quick grab covers more ground.
- ❑ Check your appliance thermometers and any temperature alarms.
- ❑ Charge phones and any battery power station to full, and know your backup plan.

✓ Do this the day before, not the morning of

Ice takes hours to freeze solid, and jugs need time in the freezer. The earlier you start, the more of this list you'll actually get done before the weather turns.

Turn them colder, starting the day before

One of the easiest things you can do costs nothing and takes ten seconds: set both dials a notch colder.

The day before a storm is forecast to arrive, turn your refrigerator and freezer down a notch colder than you normally keep them. It gives both appliances a deeper reserve of cold to draw on if the power goes out, instead of starting right at the edge of their normal range.

Keep the fridge at 40 degrees or below and the freezer at 0 degrees or below as your everyday targets — turning colder just means starting comfortably under those numbers instead of right at them, so there's more room before anything crosses the line.

✓ Give it a few hours to catch up

A fridge or freezer doesn't get colder instantly. Turn the dial down the evening before or first thing in the morning, so it has time to settle into the deeper cold before the storm actually arrives.

Freeze water jugs and gel packs

Frozen water jugs are the cheapest, most reliable cold blocks you'll ever own, and you likely already have what you need.

Fill clean plastic jugs or containers with water — plastic, not glass, since glass can crack as the water freezes and expands. Leave some headspace at the top of each jug so the ice has room to expand without splitting the container.

Gel packs work the same way and are handy for a cooler, but water jugs do double duty: they chill your freezer while frozen, and become ready-made ice the moment you need to pack a cooler or fill a gap.

I've written a whole separate guide on the water-jug trick if you want the full details on sizing and placement — it's one of the simplest habits in this entire guide series.

✓ Start freezing jugs as soon as you hear the forecast

Water takes hours to freeze solid. The moment you hear a storm's coming, get a few jugs going — don't wait until the day it's supposed to arrive.

Make or buy ice, and pre-chill a cooler

Have a cooler iced and ready to go before the lights ever flicker.

If you don't have enough homemade ice on hand yet, buy a bag or two while the store shelves are still stocked. Block ice melts slower and lasts longer; ice cubes cool faster and fill in gaps — a mix of both works well.

Pack a cooler with ice ahead of time and let it sit pre-chilled, even before you need to move any food into it. A cooler that's already cold holds its temperature far longer than one you're starting from scratch mid-outage.

✓ Keep a thermometer in the cooler too

Once food is in it, a cooler should hold at 40 degrees or below, same as the fridge. A small thermometer tells you for sure instead of leaving you to guess.

Fill empty freezer space before the storm

A full freezer holds its cold roughly twice as long as one that's only half full.

A full freezer holds safe temperatures for about 48 hours with the door closed, compared to about 24 hours for one that's half full. If yours has gaps, that's lost potential — empty space doesn't help you at all once the power's out.

Frozen water jugs are the easiest way to fill that space. Tuck them into any open shelf or corner the day before the storm, and you've turned a half-empty freezer into a nearly full one, with hours of extra cold to show for it.

✓ Every jug you add pays you back twice

A frozen jug fills freezer space and holds cold while it's in there, then becomes ice for a cooler later if you need it. It's rare that one small habit does that much work.

Eat down the most perishable food first

The less fragile food you have on hand when the storm hits, the less you risk losing.

In the day or two before a storm, plan meals around what would spoil fastest in an outage — fresh meat, poultry, fish, milk, soft cheese, and leftovers. Using it up now means there's simply less at stake if the power does go out.

This isn't about emptying the fridge. It's just about being a little intentional with what you cook first, so your most fragile food is already eaten rather than sitting in the danger zone if the clock starts running.

✓ Hardier food can wait

Butter, hard cheese, whole fruits and vegetables, and condiments tolerate a warm spell far better than fresh meat or dairy. Save those for after the storm passes.

Group your food so one quick grab counts

Arrange the fridge and freezer now, so if you do need something during the outage, one fast open covers a lot of ground.

Move the items you'll reach for most — drinks, snacks, the next meal's ingredients — onto a single shelf or bin. That way, a single quick open grabs everything at once, instead of standing there with the door open while you search.

The same idea works in the freezer: group what you'd want first, like a bag of those frozen jugs or a meal you'll cook right after the storm, somewhere easy to reach, so digging around isn't necessary later.

✓ Less digging now means less cold lost later

A few minutes of arranging today saves real cold air during the outage itself, when every open door counts.

Check your thermometers and alarms now

The day before a storm is the right time to make sure your warning systems actually work.

Look at the appliance thermometers in your fridge and freezer and confirm they're reading correctly — 40 degrees or below in the fridge, 0 degrees or below in the freezer. If you don't have one in each, this is a good time to add them.

If you use a smart plug, a temperature sensor, or any kind of alarm that alerts you to a warm fridge or freezer, put in fresh batteries and test it now. An alarm with a dead battery is no better than no alarm at all.

✓ Test it, don't just glance at it

A quick real test — like opening the door and watching for the alert — tells you far more than assuming it's working because the light is on.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

Getting ready before a storm 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, storm outages tend to be shorter, and a store or a neighbor with power usually isn't far away. A short-outage kit covers most of what you'll need.

- A cooler, a bag or two of ice, and a few frozen water jugs handle most short outages with room to spare.
- One fridge and maybe one freezer keeps your prep list short and manageable.
- If a storm is only expected to knock the power out for a few hours, turning things colder and pre-chilling a cooler is often all you need.
- A small battery power station is a quiet, indoor-safe option if storms are a regular visitor in your area.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, a storm can knock the power out for longer, and there's often more food at stake — a big chest freezer of meat or garden produce, sometimes a second fridge in the garage. If you're on a private well, remember the pump needs power too.

- Longer likely outages call for more ice and more fuel on hand, not just a single bag and a half-tank.
- A big chest freezer holds cold well if it's full and stays closed, so prep it the same way as the fridge — fill gaps with jugs.
- If a generator also has to run the well pump, the fridge is sharing that job — plan fuel and run time with the whole household in mind.
- Keep a backup thermometer in every unit, especially a freezer out in an unheated garage or barn.

★ Somewhere in between?

Plenty of homes are a mix of both. Tell me what you're protecting and how your storms usually go, and I'll help you build a prep list that actually fits. Call (330) 200-8042.

Charge everything before the storm arrives

A charged phone and a full battery station are two of the simplest things you can do, and both take almost no effort.

Charge your phone, and any spare battery packs, to full before the weather turns. A charged phone keeps you connected to forecasts, outage updates from your utility, and me, if you need a hand.

If you have a battery or solar power station, charge it to full as well. These make no exhaust, so they're safe to run indoors right next to the fridge — a quiet, simple option if you don't have or want a gas generator.

✓ Charge the small stuff too

Flashlights, lanterns, and any battery-powered radio are easy to forget until the lights are already out. Put them on the same day-before list as your phone.

! Read this first — carbon monoxide is the real danger

A running gas generator's exhaust contains carbon monoxide — an invisible, odorless gas that can kill in minutes. Never run a gas generator indoors, in a garage, in a shed, or on a porch, not even with the door open and a fan going. Run it outside only, well away from the house — the safety agencies say at least 20 feet — with the exhaust pointed away from every window, door, and vent. Put battery-backup carbon-monoxide alarms on each floor and outside the bedrooms. A battery or solar power station is the safe indoor alternative — it makes no exhaust at all. Refuel a generator only when it's off and cool — never while it's running.

If you have a generator, fuel it and test it

A generator that hasn't been tested is a gamble you don't want to take mid-storm.

The day or two before a storm, fill the tank, run the generator for a few minutes to make sure it starts and runs smoothly, and check that your cords are free of fraying or damage. Store extra fuel safely, away from the house and any heat source, in containers made for that purpose — it's much easier to catch a problem now than in the middle of an outage.

✓ 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.

Run a generator outdoors only, well away from windows, doors, and vents — its exhaust carries carbon monoxide, an invisible gas that can kill in minutes. A single appliance can run straight off the generator on a heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cord; anything wired into the house needs a transfer switch or interlock kit put in by a licensed electrician. I've written a separate guide on running a fridge on a generator that covers all of this in more depth.

Post a note by the fridge

One taped-up note answers the two questions everyone asks first: what are the rules, and when did this start?

Before the storm hits, tape a note to the fridge with the basics: keep the doors closed, a fridge holds for about 4 hours, a full freezer for about 48. Leave a blank spot to write in the exact time the power goes out.

That one written time turns every later decision from a guess into simple math. It's especially helpful if you're not the only one home, so everyone's working from the same facts instead of a half-remembered guess.

✓ A dry-erase marker works great

Write straight on the fridge door with a dry-erase marker, or tape up an index card — either way, put it somewhere you'll actually see it, not tucked in a drawer.

Two windows of time: days ahead, and the day of

Some prep needs a head start; the rest takes just minutes right before the storm arrives.

Days ahead

- Freeze water into block ice — it takes longer than you'd think, so start early.
- Fuel and test a generator if you have one, and check its cords.

The day of

- Turn the fridge and freezer a notch colder.
- Group your food so a quick grab covers more ground.
- Pre-chill a cooler with the ice you made or bought.

✓ When in doubt, start the days-ahead list today

If a storm's even a possibility, there's no harm in starting early. Ice and a tested generator are only useful if you had time to get them ready.

When the storm actually hits

Once the power actually goes out, the prep work is done — now it's just about working the plan.

Keep the fridge and freezer doors closed. Write down the time the power went out, right on that note by the fridge. From here, it's the same clock every outage runs on: about 4 hours for a closed fridge, about 48 for a full freezer.

Resist the urge to check on things every few minutes. Every open door lets cold out and warm air in — the calmest thing you can do right now is also the most effective: leave it shut and let your prep work do its job.

! When in doubt, throw it out

That's the golden rule for the food itself, once the outage is over. For now, the golden rule is simpler still: keep the doors closed.

After the storm passes

The moment the power's back isn't quite the moment to relax about the fridge and freezer.

Check your thermometers before you assume anything's fine. If the fridge stayed at 40 degrees or below, its food is good. If freezer food still has ice crystals or reads 40 degrees or below, it's safe to refreeze or cook. Anything perishable that sat above 40 degrees for 2 hours or more should be thrown out.

I've written a full after-the-outage checklist if you want to walk through it step by step. Once you're back to normal, refill and refreeze any water jugs you used, so they're ready for next time.

✓ Reset your ready kit right away

It's tempting to put prep off until the next storm's in the forecast. Do it now instead, while it's fresh, and you'll thank yourself later.

Common mistakes people make

A handful of avoidable slip-ups explain most of the trouble I see after a storm.

- **Waiting too late to freeze jugs** — water takes hours to freeze solid, and the night before is often too late.
- **Leaving the freezer half empty** when a few frozen jugs would have doubled its cold hours.
- **Having no ice ready** once the store shelves are picked over and the power's already out.
- **Never testing the generator**, so the first time it's asked to start is the worst possible moment.
- **Dead batteries in the thermometer or alarm**, right when you need them to be right.

! The pattern is always the same

Almost every one of these mistakes comes down to putting off something easy until it's too late to do. A little prep the day before fixes all five at once.

Keep a ready kit together

The fastest prep is prep you don't have to hunt for.

Keep a cooler, a working thermometer, and a couple of frozen water jugs in a spot you can grab quickly — a closet shelf, the garage, wherever makes sense in your house. When a storm's in the forecast, you're pulling a kit together, not starting from scratch.

- A cooler, ready to be iced at a moment's notice.
- An appliance thermometer, tested and with a fresh battery.
- A jug or two already frozen and waiting in the freezer.
- My number, taped up or saved in your phone.

★ Happy to help you put one together

If you'd like a hand setting up a ready kit that fits your kitchen, that's exactly the kind of visit I enjoy. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Print this before the next storm watch

Keep a copy of this list somewhere handy — the fridge door, a kitchen drawer, wherever you'll actually see it.

- ☐ Turn the fridge and freezer a notch colder.
- ☐ Freeze water jugs and gel packs.
- ☐ Make or buy ice, and pre-chill a cooler.
- ☐ Fill empty freezer space with frozen jugs.
- ☐ Group food so a quick grab covers more ground.
- ☐ Check thermometers and any temperature alarms.
- ☐ Charge phones and any battery power station.

✓ Seven small steps, one calm outage

None of these takes long on its own. Done together the day before, they add up to real hours of extra safety.

Stick this on the fridge

The short version, for the door itself.

- ☐ Turn it colder.
- ☐ Freeze jugs.
- ☐ Get ice ready.
- ☐ Group your food.
- ☐ Charge up.
- ☐ Know your plan.

★ Keep my number right next to it

Tape my number next to this card: (330) 200-8042. A quick call before or during a storm costs you nothing.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most often before a storm rolls in.

Q: How far ahead should I start getting ready?

A day or two ahead is ideal. Water takes hours to freeze solid, and a generator needs time to fuel and test, so the earlier you start, the more of this list you'll actually finish.

Q: Should I really turn the fridge and freezer colder, or is that overkill?

It's worth doing. Setting both a notch colder the day before gives you a deeper reserve of cold to draw on if the power does go out — and it costs nothing to try.

Q: How many water jugs do I actually need?

Enough to fill the empty space in your freezer, plus a few extra for a cooler. There's no harm in freezing more than you think you'll need.

Q: Do I really need to test my generator ahead of time?

Yes. The middle of a storm is the worst time to discover a generator won't start, has a bad cord, or is low on fuel. A short test run the day before catches problems while you can still fix them.

Q: What if I have no backup power at all?

You can still get through most outages just fine with coolers, ice, and the doors-closed clock — see my guide on a food-safety plan without backup power for the full rundown.

★ Still have a question?

Storm prep questions are some of my favorite calls to get, since there's still time to help before anything's at stake. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

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 getting ready before a storm hits 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

Before the Storm

An hour now, hours later



A deeper start and some frozen jugs stretch your hours.

Prep Checklist

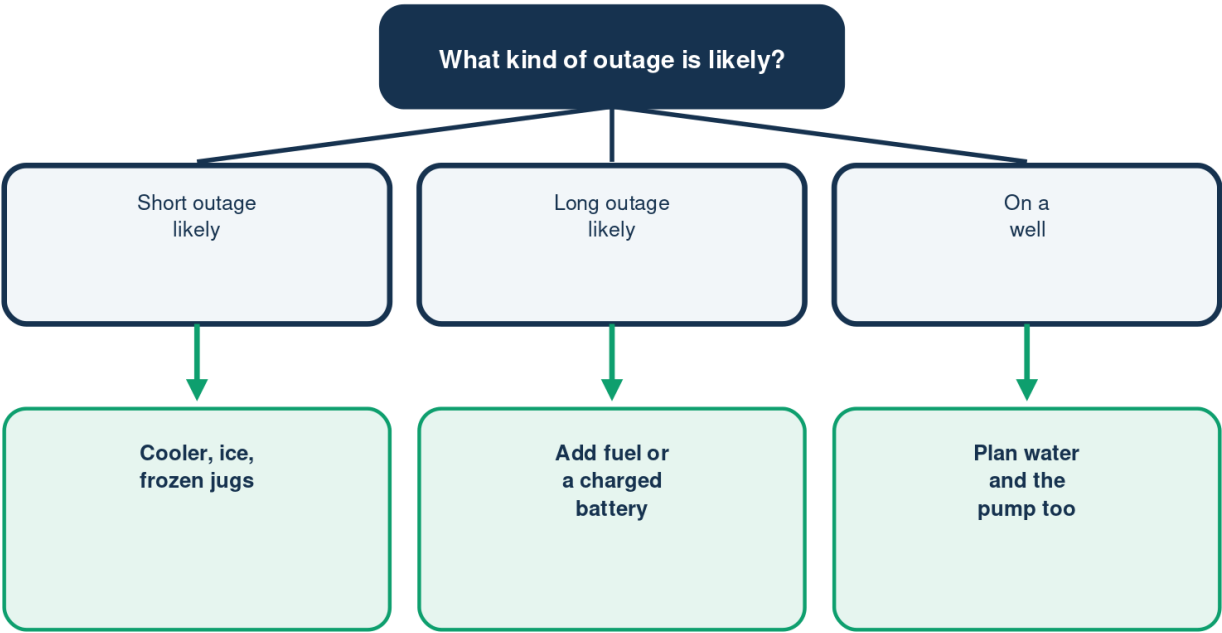
Quick wins before the lights flicker

	Do It	Why
Freeze water jugs	Yes	Cold + free ice
Make/buy ice	Yes	Cooler backup
Charge devices	Yes	Phone + battery
Test generator	Yes	No surprises

Days ahead beats scrambling in the dark.

How Much Should I Prep?

Match it to the risk



When unsure, prep for the longer outage.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Days Ahead vs Day-Of

Two windows to prep

	Days Ahead	Day-Of
Make block ice	Yes	--
Fuel the generator	Yes	--
Turn colder	--	Yes
Group the food	--	Yes

Both windows end the same way: keep the doors shut when it hits.



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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