



An Extended Guide · No. 1840

Keeping Your Basement Dry in an Outage

When the pump quits
and the rain doesn't

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! Read this first — the real outage dangers are quiet ones

When the power goes out, most of the real danger doesn't come from the dark — it comes from how we try to get by without it. Every year people are harmed by carbon monoxide from a generator, grill, or camp stove brought indoors or into a garage, and by fires from candles and unvented heaters. So three rules run through this whole guide. First, never burn anything indoors that is meant for outdoors — no generator, grill, charcoal, or camp stove in the house, garage, or on a porch, not even with a window open. Second, reach for a flashlight or a battery lantern instead of a candle. Third, keep working smoke and carbon-monoxide alarms on every level, with battery backup, and never ignore one. If an alarm sounds, or anyone feels dizzy, sick, or sleepy, get everyone to fresh air first and call 911. Water and electricity together are dangerous. Never wade into a flooded basement if water may be touching outlets, appliances, or wiring — more on that inside.

Let's keep your basement dry

Here's a problem many folks don't see coming: when the power goes out during a storm, the sump pump stops — and a basement that stays dry thanks to that pump can start to flood just when the rain is heaviest.

I'm Bill, and this catches a lot of Portage County homes, especially in our wet springs. If your basement relies on a sump pump, an outage during a downpour is exactly when it's needed and exactly when it quits. This guide covers how to keep the water out anyway.

We'll look at backup pumps, powering the sump another way, watching for trouble, protecting what's down there, and — most importantly — staying safe around water and electricity. Let's keep that basement dry.

★ Not sure about your setup?

If you're unsure whether your basement is at risk or what backup would fit, I'm glad to help you think it through. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

Keeping the basement dry, on one page

The essentials, if you remember nothing else.

- ❑ A sump pump stops when the power does — right when you need it.
- ❑ A battery-backup sump pump keeps working through an outage.
- ❑ A water-powered backup pump needs no electricity at all.
- ❑ A generator or battery station can power the sump — outdoors.
- ❑ Add a water alarm to warn you early.
- ❑ Keep belongings up off the basement floor.
- ❑ Never enter a flooded basement if water may touch electrical.
- ❑ Prevent water with good gutters and grading around the house.

! Water plus electricity is deadly

If a basement is flooding and water may be touching outlets, cords, or appliances, stay out and shut off power safely first — or call for help. Electrocuting is a real risk.

Why basements flood in an outage

It's a cruel bit of timing: the pump quits exactly when the water is worst.

Many homes stay dry because a sump pump quietly pumps out groundwater that collects under the basement. But that pump runs on electricity. When a storm knocks out the power — often during the heaviest rain — the pump stops, and water can rise in the pit and spill onto the basement floor.

So the very conditions that cause an outage, a big storm, are also the ones that send the most water toward your basement. That's why a sump-pump home needs a backup plan for outages specifically.

✓ The storm causes both problems at once

Heavy rain fills the sump pit faster and knocks out the power that runs the pump. Planning for that overlap is the whole point of this guide.

What a sump pump does

A quick look at the quiet workhorse in your basement.

A sump pump sits in a pit, called the sump, at the low point of the basement. As groundwater collects there, the pump switches on and pushes it out and away from the house, keeping the basement dry. You may hardly notice it running — until it can't. Without power, the pit fills, and the water has nowhere to go but up and out onto the floor.

✓ Know where your sump is

Find your sump pit and pump, and know the sound of it running normally. Then you'll notice quickly if it goes quiet during a storm.

Know your basement's risk

How much you need to worry depends on your particular home.

- Do you have a sump pump? If so, an outage is a flooding risk.
- Has your basement flooded or gotten damp in heavy rain before?
- Is your water table high, or your yard low or poorly drained?
- How long do your outages usually last — hours, or days?
- What's stored in the basement that water could ruin?

If your basement depends on a sump pump and you've seen water before, a backup plan is well worth it. If your basement is high, dry, and has never had an issue, your risk is lower — but it's still worth knowing your situation.

✓ Past flooding is the best predictor

If your basement has taken on water before, especially in a storm, assume it can happen again in an outage — and plan a backup.

Battery-backup sump pumps

The most common backup: a second pump that runs on a battery when the power's out.

A battery-backup sump pump is a second pump, with its own battery, that kicks in automatically when the power fails or the main pump can't keep up. It keeps pumping through an outage until the battery runs down, so keeping that battery charged and in good health is key. It's a popular, effective safeguard for a sump-pump home.

Because installing one involves the pump and sometimes the electrical, it can be worth having a plumber or electrician set it up right. I'm glad to help you understand your options and coordinate the right pro.

✓ Keep the backup battery healthy

A battery-backup pump is only as good as its battery. Test it and keep it charged, and replace the battery on schedule — a dead one helps no one in a storm.

Water-powered backup pumps

A clever option for homes on city water: a pump that needs no electricity at all.

A water-powered backup pump uses your home's municipal water pressure to pump out the sump, so it keeps working through any outage, however long, with no battery to run down. It only suits homes on city water — not wells, whose pressure depends on the same power that's out — and it does use water while running. For a city-water home prone to long outages, it's worth knowing about.

✓ No battery to die

The appeal of a water-powered backup is that it never runs out of 'charge' — it works as long as your city water pressure holds, even in a days-long outage. Only for homes on municipal water, though.

Powering the sump with backup power

If you have a generator or battery station, it can keep the main pump running.

A generator or a battery power station can power your sump pump through an outage — a good use for backup power you may already have. A sump pump has a motor that draws a starting surge, so size your backup power to handle it, as our sizing guide describes. And remember the firm rule: any generator runs outdoors only, well away from the house.

! The generator still stays outdoors

Even to save your basement, a generator never comes inside. Run it outdoors, far from the house, and feed the pump safely — a battery station is the indoor-safe alternative.

Manual backups and quick response

Low-tech options can buy time or handle a slow leak.

- A wet/dry shop vacuum can pull up water — while you have power for it.
- Buckets and a bit of bailing can keep ahead of a slow rise.
- A manual or hand pump is a no-power option for some setups.
- Keep the sump pit clear of debris so any pump works freely.
- Catching it early is far easier than a full flood.

✓ Catch it early

A basement that's just starting to take on water is far easier to manage than one that's flooded. Check early and often during a storm outage.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

Wet basements happen in town and country alike, but city water and a septic system change the options and the cautions.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town on city water, you have an extra backup option and usually shorter outages, but storm sewers can back up too.

- A water-powered backup pump is an option on city water.
- Shorter outages are easier for a battery-backup pump to cover.
- Watch for sewer backups in heavy storms, not just groundwater.
- Help and parts are close if a pump fails.

If you are out in the country on a well

In the country on a well and septic, the well pump is down too, and a septic system needs care in a wet outage.

- A water-powered backup won't work — the well pressure is off too.
- Lean on a battery-backup pump or backup power for the sump.
- Go easy on water use so a saturated septic field isn't overloaded.
- Longer rural outages mean planning for more pumping time.

★ Let's protect your basement

Town or country, I'll help you figure out the right backup for your sump and coordinate the pro to install it. Call (330) 200-8042.

Protect what's in the basement

Even with a backup, keeping valuables off the floor is cheap insurance.

- Store boxes and belongings up on shelves or pallets, off the floor.
- Use waterproof bins for anything that water could ruin.
- Keep important documents and irreplaceable items out of the basement.
- Raise electronics, appliances, and valuables where you can.
- Leave a clear path to the sump so you can check and service it.

✓ A few inches off the floor saves a lot

Most basement flooding is shallow. Simply getting boxes up onto shelves or pallets protects them from all but the worst floods.

Water alarms for early warning

A cheap alarm can turn a flood into a puddle by warning you in time.

A water alarm is an inexpensive little device that sounds when it detects water on the floor or a high level in the sump pit. Placed in the basement, it warns you early — before a slow rise becomes a real flood — so you can respond while it's still manageable. Some can even alert your phone. It's one of the best-value protections there is.

✓ An early warning is half the battle

A water alarm gives you the one thing that matters most in a basement flood: time to act. For a few dollars, it's well worth having.

Basement prep before a storm

A little preparation when heavy rain is forecast keeps the water out.

- ❑ Test that the main sump pump runs and the pit is clear.
- ❑ Confirm any battery-backup pump's battery is charged.
- ❑ Ready a generator or battery station if that's your backup.
- ❑ Get belongings up off the floor.
- ❑ Check that a water alarm is working and placed.
- ❑ Clear gutters and downspouts so water flows away from the house.

✓ Test the pump before the rain

Pour a bucket of water into the sump pit to confirm the pump switches on and clears it. Better to find a problem now than during the storm.

Septic systems in a wet outage

For rural homes, a saturated septic field needs a little care during a storm.

In heavy rain, the ground around a septic system can become saturated, and with the power out you may also be relying on stored water. Go easy on water use — fewer flushes and no big drains at once — so you don't overload a struggling septic field. If drains back up, stop using water and wait for conditions to improve. Your septic service can advise for your system.

✓ Ease off the water in a wet outage

A saturated septic field can't take much extra. Conserving water in a rainy outage protects both your water supply and your septic system.

Keeping water away in the first place

The best flood is the one that never reaches your basement.

Prevention lightens the load on any pump. Keep gutters clean and downspouts directing water well away from the foundation, make sure the ground slopes away from the house, and clear any yard drains. Bigger measures like grading or drainage improvements are worth considering for a chronically wet basement. Less water reaching the sump means less that can flood when the power's out.

✓ Point the downspouts away

Extending downspouts to carry roof water several feet from the foundation is a simple, cheap step that keeps a surprising amount of water out of your basement.

Staying safe around water and electricity

This is the most important page in the guide — please don't skip it.

Never step into a flooded basement if the water could be touching electrical outlets, cords, appliances, or wiring — the water can become electrified and electrocute you. If you can safely reach your breaker panel without standing in water, shut off power to the basement first. If you can't do it safely, stay out and call an electrician or your utility. When in doubt, keep out and get help.

! When in doubt, stay out and call for help

No belongings are worth an electrocution. If you can't shut off the power to a flooding basement safely and from dry ground, do not enter it — call a professional or your utility.

Cleaning up after a basement flood

Once it's safe, prompt cleanup limits the damage and prevents mold.

After confirming it's safe — power off, no electrical hazard — remove the water, dry everything out with fans and a dehumidifier once power's back, and discard anything soaked that can't be cleaned and dried quickly, since mold can set in fast. Photograph the damage for insurance before you clear it, as our documents guide describes, and check whether your policy covers it.

✓ Dry it out fast to prevent mold

Mold can start within a day or two of flooding. Once it's safe, get the water out and air moving quickly to head it off.

Protecting your basement for less

You can lower your risk a lot without a big project.

A water alarm and getting belongings up off the floor cost very little and prevent a lot of grief. Clearing gutters and extending downspouts is nearly free. A battery-backup pump or backup power is a bigger step, but the cheap protections — an alarm, raised storage, good drainage — go a long way on their own.

✓ Start with an alarm and raised storage

Before any big investment, put in a water alarm and get your belongings off the floor. Those two cheap steps prevent most basement heartache.

Watching the basement during a storm outage

In a wet outage, a few checks keep you ahead of the water.

- ❑ Check the basement early and often during heavy rain.
- ❑ Listen for the backup pump running, or watch the pit level.
- ❑ Keep water alarms within earshot.
- ❑ Ease off household water use to spare a septic field.
- ❑ If water rises and there's any electrical hazard, stay out.
- ❑ Catch a slow leak early with a vac or bailing while you can.

✓ A flashlight check every so often

During a storm outage, a quick flashlight look at the sump pit and floor every so often lets you catch trouble while it's still small.

Your printable basement checklist

Everything to keep the basement dry, in one place.

- ☐ Know your risk: a sump pump means outage flooding is possible.
- ☐ A backup: a battery-backup pump, water-powered pump, or backup power.
- ☐ The backup battery kept charged, or backup power ready.
- ☐ A water alarm placed and working.
- ☐ Belongings up off the floor in waterproof bins.
- ☐ Gutters clear and downspouts directed away from the house.
- ☐ The safety rule known: never enter a flooded basement with electrical hazard.
- ☐ A plan to check the basement during a storm outage.

★ Want help protecting your basement?

I'll help you assess the risk, choose a backup, and coordinate the pro to install it. A first visit is a flat \$99. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about basements and outages.

Q: Why does my basement flood when the power goes out?

Because your sump pump runs on electricity. When a storm knocks out the power — often during the heaviest rain — the pump stops, and groundwater rises in the pit and can spill onto the floor. The storm causes both problems at once.

Q: What's the best backup for a sump pump?

A battery-backup sump pump is the most common — a second pump that runs on a battery through an outage. On city water, a water-powered backup needs no electricity at all. A generator or battery station can also power the main pump.

Q: Can I run my sump pump on a generator?

Yes — a generator or battery station can power it, but a sump pump's motor draws a starting surge, so size your backup power for it. And a generator always runs outdoors, well away from the house, because of carbon monoxide.

Q: Is it safe to go into a flooded basement?

Not if the water could be touching outlets, cords, appliances, or wiring — it can become electrified. Shut off power to the basement first, only if you can do so from dry ground, or stay out and call an electrician or your utility.

Q: How can I keep water out in the first place?

Keep gutters clean and downspouts directing water well away from the foundation, make sure the ground slopes away from the house, and add a water alarm for early warning. Less water reaching the sump means less that can flood.

★ Let's keep your basement dry

From assessing the risk to choosing a backup, I'm glad to help. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and we'll make a plan to keep the water out.

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 keeping your basement dry in an outage 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.

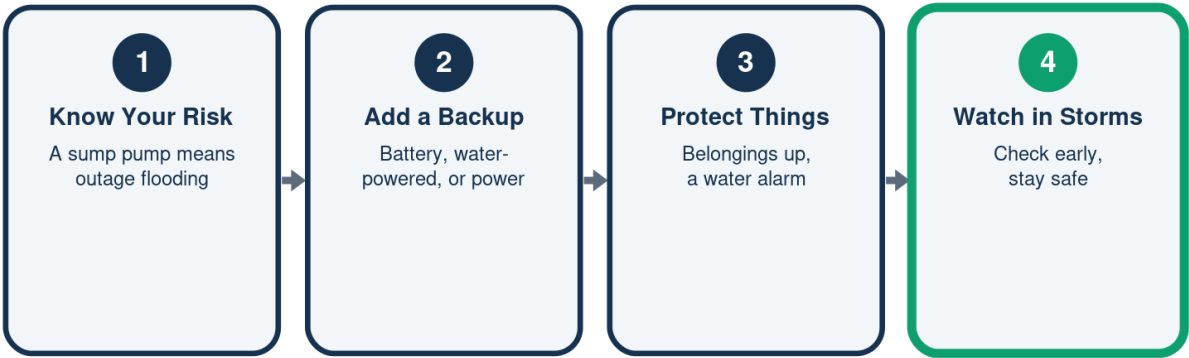
When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day,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

Keep the Basement Dry

Four steps for a sump-pump home



The storm knocks out the power and brings the water at once.

Sump Pump Backup Options

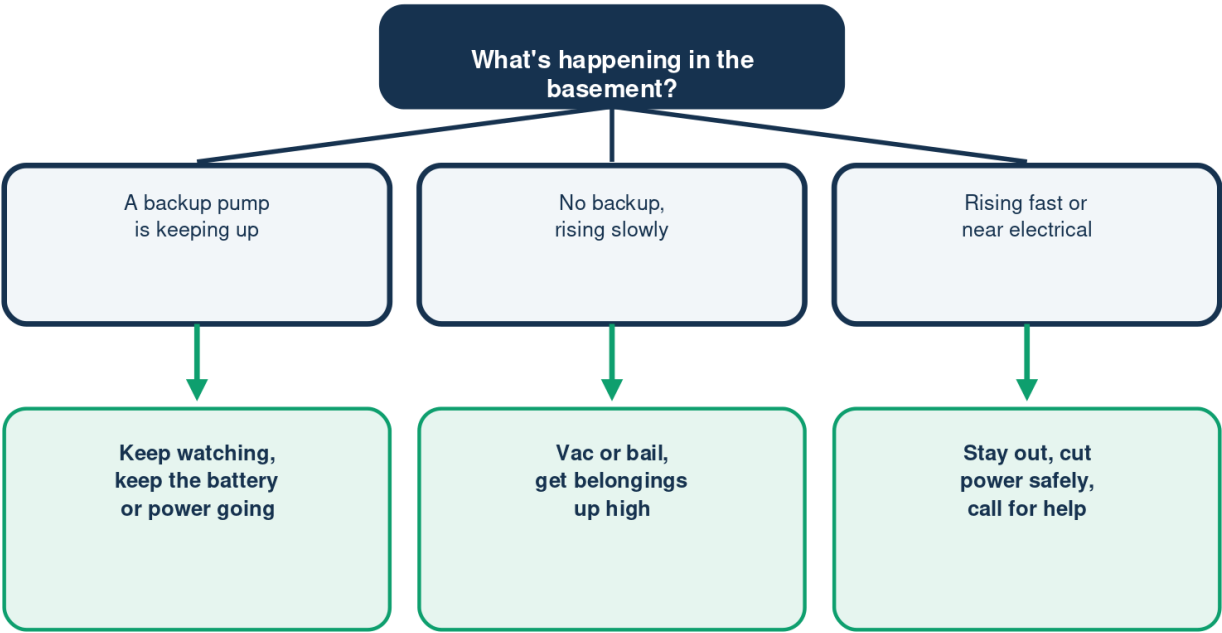
Ways to keep pumping with no power

How it works	
Battery-backup pump	A second pump on a battery
Water-powered pump	City water pressure, no
Generator or battery	Powers the main pump
Manual	Shop vac, bailing, hand pump

Water-powered only suits homes on city water.

Power's Out and Water's Rising?

Know your next move — safely



Never enter water that may be touching outlets or wiring.

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

Protect Your Basement

Cheap steps that prevent big trouble

What to do	
Early warning	A water alarm
Belongings	Up off the floor, in bins
Drainage	Clear gutters, downspouts away
Safety	Know the water-and-power rule

An alarm and raised storage prevent most basement heartache.



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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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