



An Extended Guide · No. 1766

After a Surge or Nearby Strike: What to Check

A calm walk-through
once the storm passes

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! Read this first — two kinds of protection, one safety rule

There are two kinds of surge protection in this guide, and they are not the same job. A whole-home surge protector wires into your electrical panel, where the power is always live and a mistake can be deadly — that is strictly a licensed electrician's work, almost always with a permit, and never a do-it-yourself project. (It isn't something I do myself, either; I help you understand it, choose wisely, and line up a trustworthy local pro.) The other kind — the surge-protector strips and plug-in units you use at the wall — are perfectly safe for you to set up on your own. One honest note either way: no surge protector is a lightning rod or an iron-clad guarantee, so in a violent electrical storm, unplugging a treasured device is still the surest protection of all. This guide is the calm walk-through for after a storm or a nearby strike — what to check, what you can safely reset yourself, and the one kind of thing (a burnt smell or scorching) that means stop and call a licensed electrician.

The calm walk-through, once the storm has passed

The storm's over, the power's back, and now you're wondering whether everything's all right. This guide is a gentle, in-order check so you can find out without any worry or guesswork.

I'm Bill, of Bill's Home Tech in Portage County, Ohio. In 30-plus years of house calls, I've walked a lot of folks through the after-the-storm check, and I'll tell you now what I tell them: the great majority of the time, everything is just fine. This is about confirming that calmly, and knowing the few signs that call for a closer look.

We'll go step by step — the things you can check and reset yourself, and the one or two situations where the right move is to stop and call a professional. Nothing here is urgent or scary; it's just a sensible look-around.

★ Want company on the walk-through?

If you'd rather not do this alone, call or text me at (330) 200-8042. I'm glad to walk it with you in person or right over the phone — no rush, and no silly questions.

The whole check, on one page

If you remember only these, you've got the after-storm walk-through in hand.

- ❑ Start calm — most of the time, a look-around finds everything working just fine.
- ❑ Glance at each surge protector's indicator light, and replace any whose 'protected' light has gone dark.
- ❑ Check the whole-home unit's indicator too, if you have one — or have your electrician check it.
- ❑ Look for anything that won't turn on, acts strange, or — most important — smells burnt. Unplug anything hot or smelly and don't use it.
- ❑ Reset any ground-fault (GFCI) outlets and tripped breakers — both are yours to reset safely.
- ❑ Anything scorched, or with an electrical smell, is a stop-and-call-an-electrician moment. Don't push it.

! The one line you don't cross

You can reset a breaker or swap a surge protector all day long. But a burnt smell, scorching, or an outlet that's hot to the touch means stop — unplug it if you safely can, and call a licensed electrician.

Start calm — usually, all is well

Before we check a single thing, take a breath. A surge or a nearby strike sounds dramatic, but most of the time your protection did its job and there's nothing wrong.

That's the whole point of having surge protection: to take the hit so your devices don't have to. So when you walk the house afterward, you're mostly confirming that everything's fine — not hunting for disaster. Go at an easy pace.

There's also no need to rush the moment the lights come back. Let the power settle for a few minutes first, since the jolt when electricity returns after an outage can itself be a small surge. Then begin your calm walk-through.

✓ A steady pace beats a frantic one

You don't have to check everything in the first five minutes. Walk room to room at your own speed. Nothing on this list gets worse for being checked calmly rather than in a panic.

First stop: your surge protectors' lights

Your surge protectors are the first thing worth a glance, because they're built to tell you whether they took a hit.

Most protectors have a small indicator light, often labeled 'protected.' When it's lit — usually a steady green — the surge parts inside are still working. Here's the catch that fools everyone: a used-up protector still powers your devices. The outlets still work, so folks assume all is well when the protection is actually gone.

So don't judge a protector by whether your TV turns on — judge it by that light. If the 'protected' light is out while the strip still has power, its protection is spent, and it should be replaced.

✓ There's a guide just for the lights

Some protectors also have a 'grounded' light, and a few use an alarm or no light at all. Our guide on reading the indicator lights explains each one, so a puzzling light never leaves you guessing.

Replace any protector that's used up

If a protector took the hit for you, thank it and retire it. A spent protector is the cheap part of the whole equation.

Surge protectors are meant to be sacrificial — the parts inside wear down a little with each surge until they can no longer protect. A big surge or a nearby strike can use one up all at once. When that happens, the fix is simply to swap in a new one; you don't repair them.

- Replace it if the 'protected' light has gone dark while the strip still has power.
- Replace it after any known big surge or nearby lightning strike, even if the light still looks fine.
- Replace it if it's discolored, warm, or has any burnt smell — and don't keep using that one.

✓ When in doubt, swap it out

A surge protector costs little compared to what it guards. If you're not sure whether one is still good, replacing it is the safe, easy call. Our when-to-replace guide covers the timing in more detail.

Check the whole-home unit, if you have one

If a whole-home protector is fitted at your electrical panel, it took the first and biggest hit — so it's worth a look too.

A whole-home unit has its own indicator, usually a small light right on the device at the panel. After a big storm, glance at it: a healthy light means it's still on guard. If it's changed or gone dark, the unit may have spent its protection absorbing the surge and should be checked or replaced.

Here's the important part: you only look, you don't open the panel. The unit lives among live wires, so checking or replacing it is a licensed electrician's job — just like installing it was. If the light looks off, or you can't see it easily, that's a call to make.

! Look at the panel, never inside it

Reading an indicator light on the outside of the panel is fine. Opening the panel or touching anything inside is not — those wires stay live even with the main breaker off. Leave the inside to the electrician. Our whole-home guide explains why.

Look and sniff for trouble

Your own eyes and nose are two of the best tools you have. A slow pass through the house catches almost anything that matters.

- A device that won't turn on at all, or comes on but acts strangely, right after the storm.
- An outlet, plug, protector, or device that feels warm or hot to the touch.
- Any burnt, melted, or electrical smell near an outlet, a cord, or a device.
- Any scorch marks, discoloration, or melting on an outlet, plug, or protector.

! A burnt smell or scorching means stop

If you ever smell burning or something electrical, or see scorching or melting, that's not a wait-and-see moment. Unplug the item if you can do so safely, don't use it, and call a licensed electrician. When something is hot or smells wrong, people come before hardware every time.

Reset the GFCIs and breakers — these are yours to do

A dead outlet often isn't broken at all — it's just tripped. Resetting it is a normal, safe thing for you to handle yourself.

A ground-fault outlet, or GFCI, is the kind with little 'test' and 'reset' buttons, usually in kitchens, bathrooms, the garage, and outdoors. A surge or a storm can trip one, which cuts power to it and sometimes to other outlets it protects. Press the 'reset' button firmly until it clicks, and power usually returns.

Same idea at your breaker box: a tripped breaker sits between on and off. To reset it, push it fully off first, then firmly back on. This is ordinary homeowner territory — you're only flipping a switch, not opening anything up.

✓ If it won't stay reset, stop there

Reset a breaker or GFCI once. If it trips again right away, or won't stay on, don't keep forcing it — that's the circuit telling you something needs a professional's eye. Note which one it is and call an electrician.

Blinking clocks and other small signs

Some clues are harmless little hints; others are worth a second look. Here's how to read the small stuff.

A blinking clock on the microwave, oven, or coffee maker is the most common sign of all, and the least worrying — it simply means the power dipped or blipped at some point. Reset the clock and carry on; nothing's wrong.

- Blinking clocks: the power dipped. Just reset them.
- A gadget that reboots or reconnects: usually fine after it settles.
- The internet is down: often the modem or router just needs a moment, or a power cycle.
- A remote or gadget acting oddly: try it again once things have settled.

✓ Little quirks usually settle

Many small hiccups sort themselves out within a few minutes as everything comes back to normal. Give things a moment before deciding anything's truly wrong.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

The after-storm check looks a little different depending on where you live — a rural home on a well has a couple of extra things to confirm.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town and the suburbs, outages tend to be short, and your water keeps flowing from the city main throughout. Your walk-through is mostly about the electronics — the protectors, the TV and computer, the network gear.

- Check the protector lights, look and sniff, and reset any tripped GFCI or breaker.
- Your city water means there's no pump to check after the power returns.
- A whole-home protector, if you have one, gets a glance at its indicator too.
- Give the power a few minutes to settle before plugging your treasures back in.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, outages run longer and storms hit harder, so the check is a bit fuller. When the power comes back, the well pump comes back with it, and long overhead lines mean more chance a nearby strike sent a surge your way.

- Confirm the well pump and any sump pump came back on and are running normally after the power returned.
- Check the hardwired gear a strip can't protect — the furnace and pump — for anything odd, and call the electrician if unsure.
- Glance at the whole-home unit's indicator, since it likely took a bigger hit out here.
- Because rural homes are more exposed, replacing a spent protector promptly matters even more before the next storm.

★ Rural walk-through feel like a lot?

It doesn't have to be. Tell me your setup and I'll help you build a simple after-storm checklist for your home — and coordinate the electrician for anything hardwired. Call (330) 200-8042.

What you can handle, and what needs a pro

Most of the after-storm check is yours to do. Drawing the line clearly keeps you both safe and confident.

The everyday stuff is squarely in your court: resetting a breaker or GFCI, swapping out a spent surge protector, power-cycling the modem, resetting the clocks. None of that involves opening anything dangerous.

Keep going	Stop and call a pro
Reset a breaker or GFCI	A burnt or electrical smell
Replace a surge protector	Scorching or melting
Power-cycle the modem	An outlet hot to the touch
Reset the clocks	A breaker that won't stay on

! The right kind of caution

Calling an electrician for a burnt smell or a scorched outlet isn't over-reacting — it's exactly the right instinct. Those are the signs that something behind the wall may need a trained eye, and they're worth taking seriously.

If something was damaged, write it down

If a surge did claim a device, a few notes now can make a warranty claim far smoother later. It only takes a minute.

Many surge protectors advertise a 'connected equipment warranty' — a promise to help cover devices damaged by a surge that passed through a properly used protector. These come with conditions and can be a bit of a process, so good notes help your case.

- Take photos of the damaged device and the surge protector it was plugged into.
- Keep the damaged device and the protector — don't throw them out until any claim is settled.
- Find your proof of purchase for the protector, if you can.
- Jot down the date of the storm and what happened, while it's fresh.

✓ Treat the warranty as a nice backstop

A connected-equipment warranty is a bonus, not a sure thing — read the fine print. Our guide on those warranties explains what they cover and how to claim, honestly and in plain English.

Don't forget the network gear and data lines

Because surges travel data lines too, the modem, router, and the cable line are worth their own quick check.

If your internet is out after a storm, don't assume the worst. Very often the modem and router just need a moment, or a power cycle — unplug them, wait a bit, and plug them back in, giving each a minute to fully come up. That clears most post-storm hiccups.

If they still won't connect, or won't power on at all, a surge may have reached them, possibly along the cable or phone line rather than the power cord. That's a good reminder to protect those data lines before the next storm — our lightning-safety guide covers how.

✓ A power cycle fixes a lot

Turning the modem and router off, waiting, and turning them back on is the single most useful trick for after-storm internet trouble. If that doesn't do it, that's a fine time to call me for a hand.

Give the power time to settle

One small habit smooths out a lot of after-storm trouble: a little patience when the power first returns.

The moment electricity comes back after an outage, it can arrive with a jolt — a small surge of its own. If you've unplugged your treasures for the storm, that's the perfect reason to leave them unplugged for a few minutes after the power is steady, then plug them back in once things have settled.

✓ A few minutes is all it takes

There's no need to time it to the second. Let the lights be steady for a few minutes, then reconnect your electronics. That short wait sidesteps the power-restoration jolt entirely.

A gentle room-by-room walk

If you like a checklist to follow, here's the whole walk-through in the order I'd do it. Take it at your own pace.

- ❑ Kitchen and baths: reset any tripped GFCI outlets; reset blinking clocks.
- ❑ Living room: glance at the TV's surge protector light; check the TV and cable box turn on and look normal.
- ❑ Office: check the computer, monitor, and the modem and router; power-cycle the network gear if the internet's down.
- ❑ The panel area: glance at the whole-home unit's indicator, and reset any tripped breaker (once).
- ❑ Everywhere: look and sniff for anything hot, scorched, or burnt — and stop and call a pro if you find it.
- ❑ Basement or utility: confirm the sump or well pump came back on and runs normally.

★ I'll turn this into your own checklist

On a visit I can tailor this walk-through to your exact home and rooms, so after the next storm you just follow your own simple list. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common after-storm mistakes

A few slip-ups turn a simple check into a bigger problem. Here's how to avoid them.

- **Trusting a protector because your TV still turns on** — the outlets work even when the protection is spent. Check the light.
- **Ignoring a burnt smell** or a warm outlet — those are exactly the signs to stop and call a professional.
- **Forcing a breaker back on** again and again after it keeps tripping — reset once, and if it won't hold, call a pro.
- **Plugging everything back in the instant power returns** — give it a few minutes to settle first.
- **Throwing out a damaged device and its protector** before you've documented them for a possible warranty claim.

! One trip is a reset; repeated trips are a message

It's fine to reset a breaker or GFCI once. But if it keeps tripping, that's the wiring telling you it needs a trained eye — please don't keep forcing it. Note which circuit it is and call an electrician.

After-storm signs at a glance

Here's the whole set of signs on one page, with what each one means and what to do about it.

The sign	What it means	What to do
Blinking clocks	Power dipped	Just reset them
A dead outlet	Often a trip	Reset GFCI or breaker
Protector light out	Protection spent	Replace the strip
Won't turn on	Possible surge hit	Check breakers first
Burnt smell or scorch	Possible damage	Stop — call a pro

✓ **Most of these are easy**

Look how many of these you handle yourself with a reset or a swap. Only the last line — a burnt smell or scorching — calls for a professional. That's the one to take seriously.

When trouble shows up a little later

Not all surge damage announces itself right away. It helps to know that, so a later problem doesn't catch you off guard.

Sometimes a surge weakens a device without killing it outright, and it fails days or weeks later instead. So if a television or appliance dies not long after a big storm, a surge may well have been the quiet cause — even if everything seemed fine at the time.

There's nothing alarming in this; it's just a reason to keep your protection in good shape and, if a device does fail soon after a storm, to remember the storm as a likely culprit — and to check that the protector guarding it is still healthy.

✓ A reason to keep protectors fresh

Because damage can lag behind the storm, a healthy protector on your sensitive gear keeps paying off long after the clouds clear. Replace spent ones promptly, and the next surge meets a fresh guard.

Where to begin the check

If you'd like a simple order to follow, here it is — calm and unhurried, most important first.

First, once the power's steady, do the look-and-sniff pass for anything hot, scorched, or burnt, and deal with that before anything else — it's the one thing that can't wait. Almost always, you'll find nothing, and you can relax into the rest.

Then, check the protector lights and replace any that are spent, reset any tripped GFCIs and breakers, glance at the whole-home unit, and power-cycle the network gear. Document anything that was damaged, and you're done — ready for the next one.

★ Rather have a hand with it?

Tell me what you're seeing and I'll help you sort out what matters from what doesn't — in person or right over the phone. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

How I can help

The after-storm check is exactly the kind of thing that's easier with a patient helper who isn't trying to sell you anything.

I can walk your home with you after a storm, check the protectors and replace any that are spent, reset what needs resetting, and sort out the network gear so you're back online. I'll help you tell a harmless quirk from a real problem, so you're neither ignoring something nor worrying over nothing.

For anything that needs a professional — a scorched outlet, a breaker that won't hold, the whole-home unit at the panel — I don't do that electrical work myself, but I'll help you understand it and line up a trustworthy licensed electrician, so you're never left guessing.

★ Real help, close to home

A first in-home visit is a flat \$99, and for simple things I can often help over the phone or a screen-share for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most after a storm, answered plainly and calmly.

Q: My TV still turns on — does that mean the surge protector is fine?

Not necessarily. A used-up protector still powers your devices, so the outlets working tells you nothing. Judge it by the 'protected' light: if that's out while the strip has power, replace it.

Q: An outlet is dead after the storm. Is it broken?

Usually not — it's often just tripped. Press the reset button on a GFCI outlet, or reset the breaker for that circuit. If it won't stay on, stop and call an electrician.

Q: I smell something burnt near an outlet. What do I do?

Treat that seriously. Unplug the item if you can do so safely, don't use it, and call a licensed electrician. A burnt or electrical smell, or any scorching, is a stop-and-call moment, not a wait-and-see one.

Q: The internet went out during the storm. Is my equipment fried?

Often not. Try a power cycle first: unplug the modem and router, wait a bit, and plug them back in, giving each a minute. If they still won't connect or won't power on, a surge may have reached them.

Q: A device died a couple of weeks after the storm. Could the storm be why?

Quite possibly. A surge can weaken a device so it fails later rather than right away. It's a good reason to keep fresh protectors on your sensitive gear and replace any that are spent.

★ Still have a question?

That's what I'm here for. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and describe what you're seeing — there's no such thing as a silly question after a storm.

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 checking your home after a surge 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.

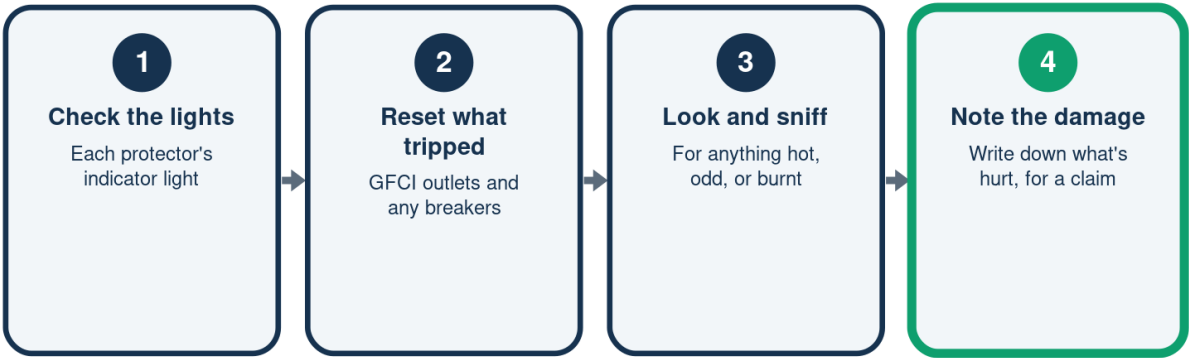
When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day,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

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

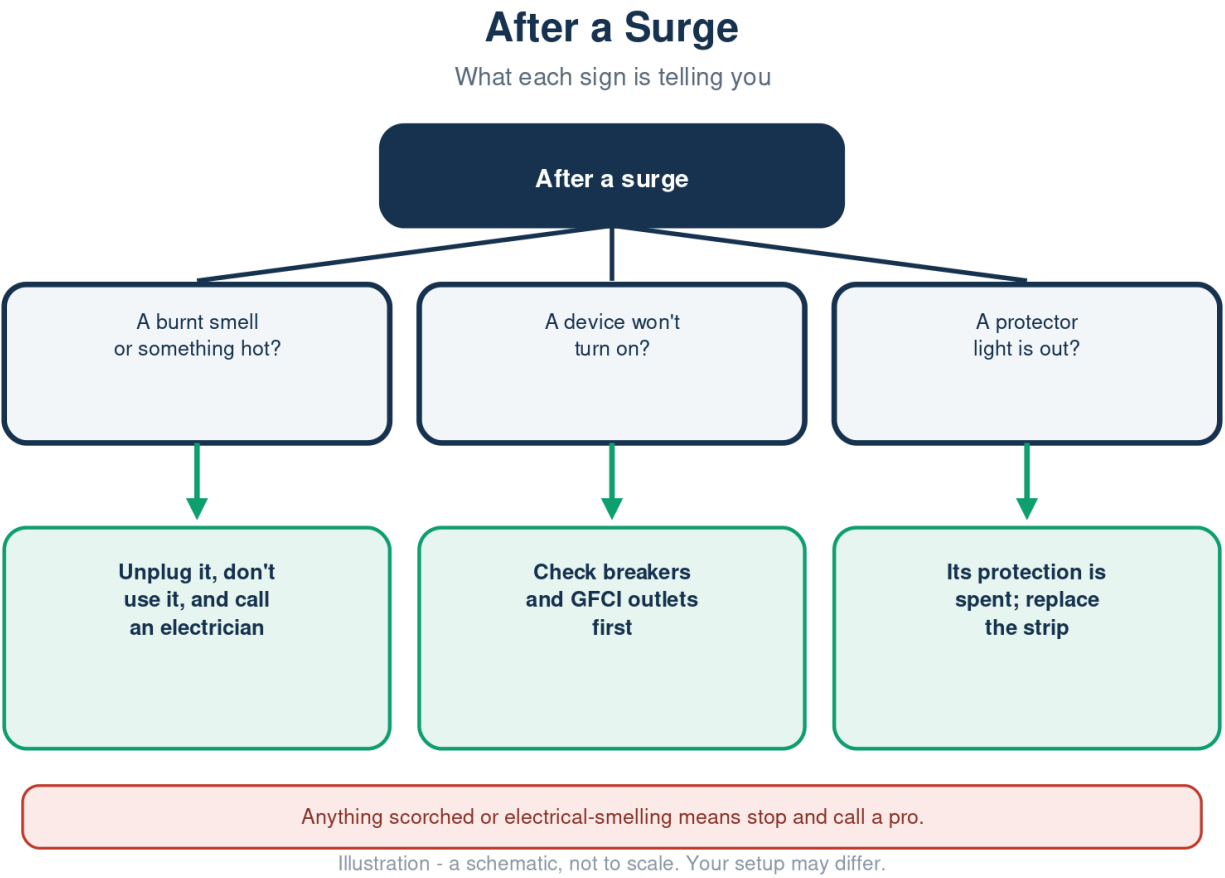
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Your After-Storm Walk-Through

A calm check, in a sensible order



Most of the time, a calm look-around finds everything just fine.



Signs and What to Do

Reading the clues after a storm

	What it means	What to do
Blinking clocks	Power dipped	Just reset them
Dead outlet	Tripped off	Reset GFCI/breaker
Protector light off	Protection spent	Replace the strip
Burnt smell	Possible damage	Stop, call a pro

Most signs you handle yourself; a burnt smell you don't.

Keep Going, or Stop and Call?

Where the safe line is drawn

	Keep going	Stop and call
Reset a breaker	Yes	No
Replace a strip	Yes	No
Burnt smell	No	Yes
Scorched outlet	No	Yes

Resets and swaps are yours; scorching and burnt smells are a pro's.



Need a Real Person?

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Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



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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