

Home Alone: When winter leaves you stranded

When the power goes out this winter – and chances are that it will – are you ready to settle in for a winter adventure? Or will you be playing out an extended and stressful episode of your very own Survivor show? At one time or another, most of us have been caught suddenly in the dark – with a house getting progressively colder and supplies dwindling. This winter, do a little pre-planning so you and your family will be ready for whatever winter throws your way.

- **Keep warm.** How do you heat your home, and what will happen if you lose power? How long could you stay in your home? Do you have any auxiliary heaters? If so, ensure they're well-maintained. If you have a fireplace, make sure you have an ample wood supply.
- **Put together a Storm Kit.** Include a battery-powered radio, lots of working flashlights, and an extra set of keys for the house and the car. And don't forget batteries... lots of them, in every kind you can imagine needing. Include an information sheet with the local emergency numbers and your hydro account number. Add any prescription medication or baby formula that might be necessary for your family. Keep some non-perishable food that can be eaten without heating, a can opener (non-electric, please), and bottled water and juices in your kit, too. This won't be a good time to discover you need to make a run to the grocery store!
- **Know your local emergency plans.** If it isn't possible to travel, find out your municipality's contingency plan for just such a situation. Listen to your local radio station for updated information. And think about a neighbourhood network; be aware of who might need help, like the elderly or a mother with a newborn.
- **Decide on a home away from home.** If you won't be able to stay warm at home, establish a plan for where you will go and how you'll get there. Make sure all family members know where you'll be heading – in case you're not all together and communications are limited.

- **Keep a "Good to Go" folder handy.** In case you must leave your home quickly, you'll want your Storm Kit, plus your "Good to Go" folder: with cash, contact numbers and official documents (health cards, birth certificates, credit and debit cards). And before you head out into uncertain conditions, always ensure you have some extra warm clothes and blankets.

- **Keep the gas tank topped up.** You won't get far on an empty tank. Try to keep your car's gas tank topped up throughout the winter, especially if you hear that a storm is on the way. You'll be better prepared for a longer power outage, and it's good for your gas tank too.

- **Insulated water pipes.** Take care of your water pipes before you lose your heat source. You'll not only save energy, but your pipes will be able to ride out the heat loss for a longer period of time. Wrap them in heat tape, trickle water from your taps, and if the heat does not return for two days or more – consider draining your system completely in order to avoid frozen pipes. Have a chat with your local utility – or look it up online – before the storm arrives.

- **Don't let desperation cloud your judgment.** Open flames are hazardous, so go easy on the candles. Get some hurricane lanterns for indoor use; ask questions when you buy and know how to use them safely. Under no circumstances should you try bringing a barbecue or camp stove indoors. And generators must be used with caution; never use one in your home, attached garage, basement or crawlspace. Follow these safety steps and you won't become a victim of fire, carbon monoxide poisoning, or heart attack – the big three causes of death and injury after a big storm.

Have you considered what you need to do to be prepared? Take a few moments; you'll be glad you did.



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