

Basic Utilities

Most people take the provision of basic utilities (i.e. electricity, water, natural gas or propane, etc.) for granted even though these require some form of delivery. In an emergency situation, these methods of delivery may be interrupted, and it could be for an extended period. Also remember that a number of items in your home require more than one utility to function. A forced air heating system requires both gas and electricity, a hot water heater requires both gas and water, etc. So if you lose one form of utility, you can lose the use of other forms also.

Let's look at each of these and what options are available to handle an extended loss.

Loss of Electrical Power

Every year, we normally have some power outages in the electrical utility. This causes the loss of the ability to light our homes, operate a number of appliances, run heater fans, operate well and pressure pumps, and disrupts normal means of communication. The normal means for supplying emergency power is a back-up generator. This is a good method as long as the outage is not prolonged since generators require fuel to operate. There are two things you can do to prolong your available fuel. One is to add a fuel stabilizer, such as Sta-Bil, to avoid fuel degradation. Stored fuel should be replaced at least annually. The other thing is to run the generator on a schedule such as one hour on and three hours off, or an as-needed basis. Using the on/off schedule would allow most generators to function for seven to ten days on 20 gallons of gasoline.

Loss of Water

Loss of power will often mean the loss of water availability for those with wells and pressure tanks. In addition to the use of a generator, there are small solar pump and panel systems designed for water systems. These systems will require a water tank as they do not function during the hours of darkness unless they have a battery storage system. The main drawback is the initial purchase price which could be in the thousand's of dollars.

There are also hand pump systems that can be co-located with electrical pump systems in a well. While the hand pump will supply water directly or to a storage tank, they will not supply water pressure to a house. The main drawback with a hand water pump is the likeliness of freezing in cold weather since they are an above ground unit.

A bucket and storage tank are the most simple method for obtaining water. The drawbacks to this method are the time required and the availability of an open water source. A bucket can also be used to refill the tank on toilets and the toilets will remain functional. Use non-drinking water for this purpose.

Loss of Natural Gas/Propane

While most people who have propane have a tank that is at least 250 gallons, there is always the possibility of running out of propane. Since propane is used for cooking, heating water, heating the house and other things, it is always wise to have an alternate method to perform these tasks.

Coleman type propane stoves can be used to cook and heat moderate quantities of water. A small propane cylinder will last approximately one week if used for basic cooking. This type of stove will also be required if you have an electric range and lose electrical power. The Coleman type stoves should not be used to heat a house or room due to fumes. Don't forget to buy a spark igniter.

The best alternative to heat a home or room is a wood stove. If sized appropriately, these will heat the entire home and require neither gas or electricity. They can also be used to heat water and food. If they can not heat the entire house, close off rooms that are not in use.

Solar showers are a good source for heating water for bathing and general use. A solar shower should NOT be used to heat cooking water unless it is specifically dedicated for use with purified water.