

SEMO Offers Safety Tips to Follow During Electric Outages

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The New York State Emergency Management Office (SEMO) today reminded New Yorkers of steps they should take to remain safe during electric power outages caused by the first of a 1-2 winter storm punch.

“Our biggest concern is the threat of carbon monoxide poisoning from faulty alternative heating sources or by not following common sense,” said John R. Gibb, Director of SEMO. “Approximately 1,000 lives are lost each year in the United States due to carbon monoxide poisoning, also known as the silent killer.”

A colorless, odorless gas, carbon monoxide can be produced by faulty home heating systems, automotive exhaust, and obstructed chimneys. The gas can also be produced by poorly vented generators, kerosene heaters, gas grills and other items used for cooking and heating when used improperly during the winter months.

“By now, residents should have had a professional check out the furnace, woodstove and chimney to ensure that they are in good working order and that the flue is clear,” Gibb said. He then offered these safety tips:

- Only operate electric generators outdoors and downwind from the residence. Generators should never be run indoors, even in a garage with the door open. The motor emits deadly carbon monoxide gas.
- Do not use charcoal to cook indoors. It, too, can cause a buildup of carbon monoxide.
- Do not use a gas oven to heat a residence – prolonged use of an open oven in a closed house can create carbon monoxide gas.
- Make sure fuel space heaters are used with proper ventilation.
- Motor vehicles should never be run in a closed garage no matter how cold it is outside.

“Make sure that carbon monoxide, smoke and heat detectors are properly installed in your home,” Gibb advised, “and test the batteries to ensure reliability.”

Gibb said that people should stay away from any downed electrical wires. “Always treat a downed wire as being live. If you see a downed wire, contact your utility.”

If you lose electrical power, the SEMO Director advised following these tips:

- Call your utility first to determine area repair schedules. Turn off or unplug lights and appliances to prevent a circuit overload when service is restored. Leave one light on to indicate power has been restored.
 - To help prevent freezing pipes, turn on faucets slightly. Running water will not freeze as quickly.
 - Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to help reduce food spoilage.
- If your heat goes out, you can keep warm by closing off rooms you do not need.
- Use only safe sources of alternative heat such as a fireplace, small well-vented wood or coal stove or portable space heaters. Always follow manufacturer's instructions.
 - Dress in layers of lightweight clothing and wear a cap.
 - Eat well-balanced meals.

With one storm in the eastern half of the State subsiding today and another expected tomorrow, Gibb urged New Yorkers to review their emergency plans at home and at work and have a portable cache of emergency supplies on hand. “Everyone in your family should know who to call and where to go in case of emergency,” Gibb said. “Monitor your local weather conditions closely. Stay tuned to local radio and television stations, NOAA Weather Radio or NY-ALERT at www.nyalert.gov for the latest weather information, and plan your activities accordingly.”

Gibb also stressed the importance of caring for the elderly and physically disabled during winter storm events. “Keep an eye on your neighbors and be prepared to lend a helping hand,” he said.

For more information on how individuals can be better prepared for emergencies and for winter safety tips, visit the SEMO website at www.nysemo.state.ny.us. Follow SEMO on Twitter at www.twitter.com/NYSEMO .

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