



Home fire safety fact sheet

Power Outages

Whenever there is a power outage the risk of house fires increases.

It is easy to forget to turn off electrical appliances that were operating at the time of the power outage, then go to bed or leave the house. When power is restored these appliances may be left running unattended for extended periods of time.

During a power outage people may also use alternative light, heating and cooking sources – candles, flame lanterns, kerosene heaters, camping stoves or portable gas stoves. All of the above items present a higher fire risk than the equivalent electrical appliance.

When there is a Power Outage

- Turn off:
 - all lights and appliances that were in use at the time except fridges and freezers
 - cooktops, ovens and microwaves
 - heaters - both electric heaters and gas heaters with electric fans
 - washing machines and clothes dryers
 - air conditioners, evaporative coolers and fans
 - any handheld devices or appliances.
- Unplug laptops and computers to prevent them from turning on when the power is restored.
- Unplug any items that are on charge.

Please note: different brands of air conditioners respond in different ways to power outages. Please refer to the “Be Prepared” section below.

The SA Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) strongly recommends that you use battery powered torches or lanterns as alternative lighting. Wind up torches are also available.

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If you use open flames to provide alternative light sources (e.g. candles or lanterns), heating (e.g. open fires or kerosene heaters) or cooking (e.g. barbeques or open fires) then special care must be taken to reduce the fire danger and possible by-product emissions.

Candles

- Candles should only be used by adults.
- They should be used in sturdy holders that will not tip over, placed on a surface that is clear of all combustibles and out of reach of children.
- Do not use candles when fuelling equipment such as generators, kerosene heaters or kerosene lanterns as the flame may ignite the fumes.
- Avoid carrying candles around and do not take candles into confined spaces like walk-in wardrobes.
- Extinguish all candles when leaving the room or going to sleep.

See our Home Fire & Life Safety fact sheet on [Candles](#) for more information.

Cooking

- Do not use outdoor gas barbeques, charcoal braziers/stoves, butane stoves or any other gas cooking appliances inside the house to avoid the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- During the Bushfire Danger Season always check for Fire Bans and any local council restrictions before you light a cooking fire outdoors. Ring the South Australian Bushfire Information hotline on 1300 362 361.

Heating

- Do not use gas ovens or cooktops as heating during a power outage.
- Using an open fire:
 - If you haven't used the fireplace for some time be aware that chimneys should be cleaned regularly and roof spaces checked for rubbish near the chimney (bird and vermin nests).
 - If you have never used the fireplace, are you sure that the chimney is not only clean but properly connected and operational? Have it checked before using it by a trained service technician.
 - Always use a full-size fire screen to prevent sparks or embers coming into contact with carpets, furniture or other flammable items and to prevent children falling into the fire.
 - If your fireplace is not maintained or you don't have a fire screen, it is safer to dress in warmer clothing until power is restored.

See our Home Fire & Life Safety fact sheet on [Home Heating](#) for more information.

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Be Prepared!

- Make sure that you have batteries, torches, rechargeable lanterns or wind-up torches on hand to light your home safely in the event of a power outage. Ensure that everyone knows where to find them and that if they are used for other purposes they are always returned.
- People who rely on power to run life support equipment should register with their electricity retailer and prepare an action plan with their doctor. They should regularly check the back-up battery of their equipment to ensure that it's fully charged and ready for use.
- Be aware that cordless phone handsets require power to operate and will not work during a power outage. Ensure you have another way of communicating in an emergency (mobile phone, hardwired phone).
- Be aware that homes connected to the National Broadband Network (NBN) may not be able to use their hard-wired phones during a power outage. The NBN system does not have a battery backup for phone operation as part of the standard installation unless it is specifically requested. If a NBN battery backup is installed, it is limited in its capacity to maintain power to a phone for an extended period.
- Check the instructions for your air conditioner, or ring the manufacturer to determine how your brand and type of air conditioner will respond to a power outage. Some brands have a manual power switch which you should turn off to prevent the unit from turning back on automatically when power is restored. Others have a cut out mechanism. You need to know beforehand what your air conditioner is programmed to do so that you can take action if you leave the house. The MFS does not recommend leaving cooling equipment running when you leave the house.
- Know how to use the manual over-ride on garage roller doors and electric security shutters.
- Your 240v smoke alarm may chirp when the power is out but it will still work if the back-up battery is charged.
- Have a battery-operated radio and spare batteries available. If the power outage is significant your emergency services broadcaster is likely to broadcast information and updates.