

72 Hours Without Utilities – 9 Items You’ll Need after Disaster Strikes

Natural disasters like hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods often cause widespread destruction, leaving many without power, water, or gas for days. Year after year heroic linesmen come together to re-establish power as soon as possible after a hurricane or a tornado strikes. While they’re doing everything in their power to restore the grid, the first 72 hours after a disaster are still going to be mostly on you to survive if you’ve decided to stay in place.

The same has been true for Hurricane Milton which threatened mass destruction when it was still a Category 5 hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico, though, thankfully, it lessened to a Category 3 on landfall near Siesta Key, which has still been destructive enough to leave at least five dead and millions without power, but could have been much, much worse.

If you live in an area prone to devastating weather you’ll probably want to do a lot of prepping, but if you’re new to prepping, it might be hard to know where exactly to start, and that’s what we’re looking at in this article, with a focus on what you’ll need if you decide to stay, or you’re forced to, as many have been during Hurricane Milton, by gas shortages at pumps due to the mass evacuations, over 2000 gas stations in Florida running out of fuel these days.

1. Water and Purification Supplies

Water is your most essential resource in the first 72 hours without utilities. The recommended minimum is one gallon of water per person per day, covering both drinking and sanitation needs. However, when utilities are down, accessing

clean water can become impossible. It's not enough to have bottled water; you should also have water purification tablets or a portable water filter, as well as something called flocculants.

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The best advice for water is to boil it, as that's the simplest tried and tested way to have good drinking water. Flocculants can help with that as well as they clear particles in water. At the very least have, besides stored water, a flocculant and a camping stove so you can turn any water into drinkable water.

2. Non-Perishable Food for Quick Nourishment

When the power goes out, refrigerated and frozen foods spoil quickly. For the first 72 hours, you'll need non-perishable, ready-to-eat foods that don't require cooking. Canned goods like beans, vegetables, and soups are staples, as are dry goods such as energy bars, nuts, and jerky. Look for high-calorie, nutrient-dense options to maintain your energy during a high-stress situation.

Also take into account how your food is portioned, as following a disaster you might be forced to evacuate nonetheless, if your home is no longer habitable and you won't realistically be lugging around a sack of beans, even if that would be the cheapest option.

3. First Aid Kit and Prescription Medications

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, medical services may be delayed or unavailable. A well-stocked first aid kit is vital for treating injuries and ailments while you wait for help. Include basics like adhesive bandages, antiseptic wipes, pain relievers, gauze, and medical tape. In this regard, remember that more of the basics is usually better as a lot of cuts and scrapes are the more likely injuries post-disaster

Don't forget to include prescription medications you or your family members may need. Refill prescriptions regularly to ensure you always have a sufficient supply in case pharmacies are closed or inaccessible for an extended period. It's also a good idea to store over-the-counter medications for common issues like allergies, indigestion, or colds.

Be sure to pack in your first aid kit some superglue as it's a sterile and a quick way to close up small cuts and nicks.

4. Battery-Powered Radio and Backup Power Sources

When utilities go down, communication systems often follow. You can be cut off from vital news and emergency updates during those critical 72 hours. A battery-powered or hand-crank radio is your best way to stay informed. NOAA weather radios are particularly helpful for receiving official emergency alerts and updates about ongoing conditions.

To ensure your electronic devices stay powered, have backup power sources like extra batteries, a solar charger, or a portable power bank. These can help keep essential items like your phone charged, which is crucial for communication with family and emergency services.

We can't stress the importance of good communication systems, the best example why this is necessary are Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne in 2004. After Frances hit Florida on September 5, 2004 as a Category 2 hurricane, it was followed by Hurricane Jeanne making landfall as a Category 3 only two miles away three weeks later, pounding the same area and being one of the deadliest hurricanes in history. Moreover, we shouldn't forget that hurricanes frequently spawn tornadoes around them, Hurricane Frances spawning 103 by itself.

5. Flashlights, Lanterns, and Headlamps

The first 72 hours without power can be especially challenging at night. Darkness can make navigating a damaged home or neighborhood dangerous, especially with debris and potential hazards in your path. LED flashlights, headlamps, and lanterns are critical for ensuring safe movement after nightfall.

Opt for battery-powered or solar-powered lights. Consider having a mix of both to avoid running out of batteries too soon. Rechargeable options can be powered using a solar charger during the day, making them more useful in long outages.

6. Temporary Shelter

If your home is severely damaged or flooding makes it unsafe to stay inside, you'll need a backup shelter plan. Emergency tents or tarps can serve as makeshift shelters, protecting you from the elements while you await rescue or repairs. Tarps are also useful for covering damaged roofs or broken windows, helping keep out rain or wind.

Staying warm is another challenge, especially if temperatures drop or you're wet from flooding. Emergency blankets, or space blankets, are compact but highly effective at reflecting body

heat, helping prevent hypothermia in cold or wet conditions.

7. Personal Hygiene and Disinfection

The first 72 hours after a disaster, you could probably not care less about personal hygiene, but that changes if you need to do wound management. Stock up on essentials like hand sanitizer, wet wipes, and rubbing alcohol. These allow you to stay relatively clean even when you can't access a shower.

You'll also need to think about waste management. You could spring for a small composting toilet, but those are expensive and another thing to lug around. While not the most glamorous, a bucket and some heavy duty trash bags get the job done.

8. Important Documents and Cash

In the chaos of evacuating or dealing with a disaster's aftermath, it's easy to forget essential documents. Store copies of identification, insurance policies, medical records, and property deeds in a waterproof and portable container. This ensures quick access to the information you need when applying for relief aid or filing insurance claims.

Since electronic payment systems often go down, having cash on hand is crucial. Small bills are particularly useful, as many stores and vendors may only be able to make limited change. Ensure you keep an emergency stash to buy essential items if ATMs and credit card systems are out of service.

9. Personal Protective Gear

After a natural disaster, hazards like broken glass, exposed nails, or fallen debris can make even basic movement risky. Sturdy work gloves and thick-soled boots are essential to

protect your hands and feet as you clear debris or move through damaged areas.



Conclusion

If you do decide to not evacuate from coming natural disasters or live in an area prone to flooding, it pays to be prepared. If you remember the rule of threes, you can survive three days without water or food, so you could probably get away with not being prepared or losing those preps in the disaster, but the most important aspect of preparedness is situational awareness.

If at any point, it comes down to leaving and surviving, or staying and dying, always choose the former and always be aware of your breaking point or the point where your situation is no longer tenable and you need to leave.