



Ask a Utility Worker



Power outages can be frustrating and dangerous. Learn how to be prepared before, during, and after a power outage as we "Ask a Utility Worker."

How do I prepare for a power outage?

Know who to contact.

- Write down, print or save toll-free outage hotlines for your electric utility and/or your natural gas utility company. You can locate them on your monthly bill and they are also on the Public Utility Commission (PUC) website.
- Keep cell phones charged, so you can contact your utility, other emergency services, and family members during any power outage.
- Secure necessary food, medicine and other supplies, including batteries for flashlights.

What should I do if I lose power during a storm?

Contact your utility.

- Call your utility hotline to report outages. Do not assume that the utility already knows about your outage or that others have already called.
- Check on elderly neighbors and those with special needs who might need assistance.
- Stay away from objects and puddles of water that are in contact with downed power lines.
- Only call 9-1-1 if there is a hazardous situation, such as a downed/live power line on a street or structure.

How do I stay safe until my power is restored?

Use safe sources for power.

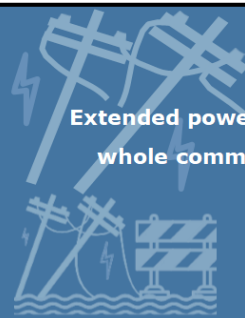
- Use flashlights or battery-operated lanterns for emergency lighting.
- Do not use candles or other open flame sources as they are potential fire hazards.
- If you use a generator, place it outside. Do NOT run it inside a home or garage.
- Connect the equipment you want to power directly to the outlets on the generator, not your home's electrical system, which could shock or injure utility crews working on nearby power lines. Turn off lights and electrical appliances except for the refrigerator and freezer.
- Wait at least 15 minutes after power is restored before turning on other appliances.

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BE PREPARED FOR A POWER OUTAGE


Extended power outages may impact the whole community and the economy.




May disrupt communications, water, transportation



May close retail businesses, grocery stores, gas stations, ATMs, banks, and other services



Can cause food spoilage and water contamination



Can prevent use of medical devices

Ask a Utility Worker continued...



Can an electrical power outage affect my natural gas appliances?



- Yes, electric power outages can affect gas furnaces and other appliances.
- If they do not function properly when power is restored, call a professional for service.
- If you smell natural gas, make sure everyone leaves the building immediately.
- Leave the door open and do NOT use phones, cellphones, or light switches.
- Do NOT turn appliances on or off.
- After you are safely outside, call 9-1-1 from your cell phone or neighbor's home. Do not re-enter until you are told to do so.

Know Your Terms - Winter Weather Terminology

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|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Winter Weather Advisory | Issued for accumulations of snow, freezing rain, freezing drizzle, and sleet which will cause significant inconveniences and, if caution is not exercised, could be life-threatening. |
| Winter Storm Watch | Alerts the public to the possibility of a blizzard, heavy snow, heavy freezing rain, or heavy sleet. Watches are usually issued 12 to 48 hours before a storm begins. |
| Winter Storm Warning | Issued when hazardous winter weather (i.e. heavy snow, heavy freezing rain or sleet) is imminent or occurring. Warnings are usually issued 12 to 24 hours before a storm begins. |
| Blizzard Warning | Issued for sustained or gusty winds of 35 mph or more and falling or blowing snow creating visibilities at or below ¼ mile, lasting at least three hours. |
| Wind Chill Advisory | Issued when wind chill temperatures are expected to be a significant inconvenience to life with prolonged exposure. |
| Wind Chill Warning | Issued when wind chill temperatures are expected to be hazardous to life within several minutes of exposure. |
| Snow Flurries | Light snow falling for short durations. No accumulation or light dusting is all that is expected. |
| Snow Showers | Snow falling at varying intensities for brief periods of time. Some accumulation is possible. |
| Snow Squalls | Brief, intense snow showers accompanied by strong, gusty winds. Accumulation may be significant. Snow squalls are significant life-safety hazards while driving. |
| Blowing Snow | Wind-driven snow that reduces visibility and causes significant drifting. Blowing snow may be snow that is falling and/or loose snow on the ground picked up by the wind. |
| Sleet | Rain drops that freeze into ice pellets before reaching the ground. Sleet usually bounces when hitting a surface and does not stick to objects but can accumulate like snow. |
| Freezing Rain | Rain that falls onto a surface with a temperature below freezing. This rain then freezes on contact with surfaces, such as trees, cars, and roads, forming a coating or glaze of ice. Small accumulations of ice can cause a significant hazard. |

Winter Weather Words

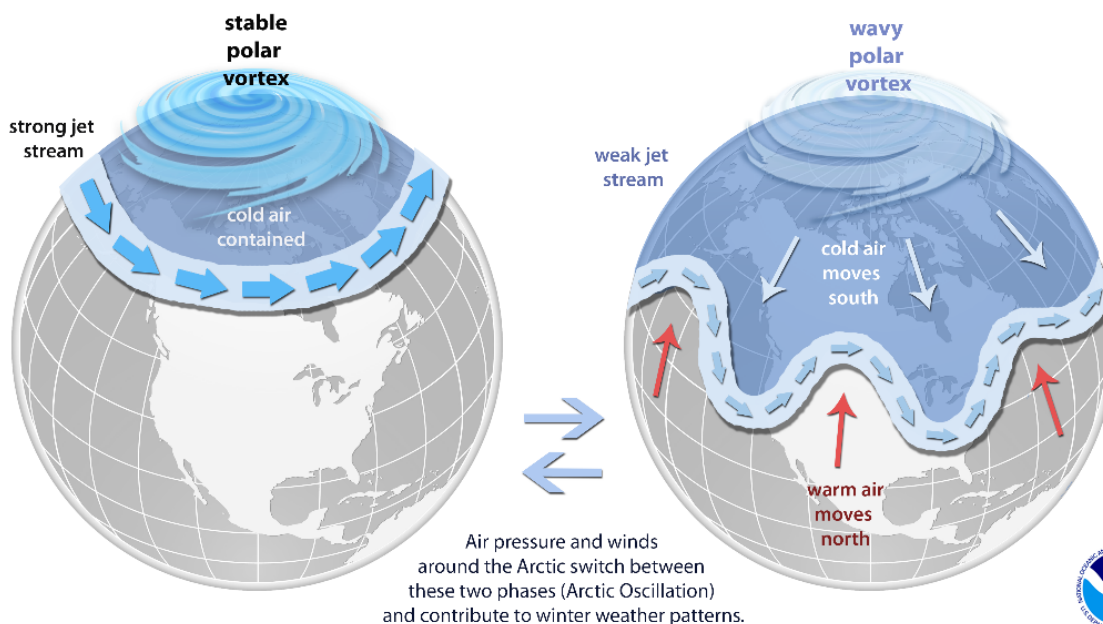
Weather catch phrases are thrown about all year round, but during the winter season we typically hear two that surface: polar vortex and bomb cyclone. While these phrases have been around the meteorological community for decades, they have become catch phrases in recent years through the media. Let's talk about both.

Polar Vortex:

This sounds nasty, and for warm weather lovers it may very well be the case. But in reality, the polar vortex exists nearly year-round, sitting at both the north and south poles. Simply put, the polar vortex is a frigid, arctic low-pressure system spiraling over the poles. At times, this spinning mass of very cold air expands and contracts. A strong jet stream tends to keep most of the cold air in place at the poles, but weakness in the jet stream can allow blobs of this colder air to push south. These weaknesses tend to set up a blast of arctic air into Pennsylvania.

The Science Behind the Polar Vortex

The polar vortex is a large area of low pressure and cold air surrounding the Earth's North and South poles. The term vortex refers to the counterclockwise flow of air that helps keep the colder air close to the poles (left globe). Often during winter in the Northern Hemisphere, the polar vortex will become less stable and expand, sending cold Arctic air southward over the United States with the jet stream (right globe). The polar vortex is nothing new — in fact, it's thought that the term first appeared in an 1853 issue of E. Littell's *Living Age*.

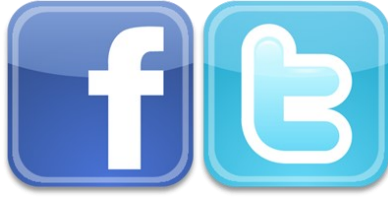


Bomb Cyclone:

What an explosive term! But really, this is a catchy term for the process of a storm, winter or otherwise, that quickly intensifies. The full definition is a low-pressure system (the cyclone or storm) which drops pressure by 24 millibars (pressure measurement) in 24 hours (the bombing portion of the definition). In normal terms, this means the storm has rapidly strengthened, which can lead to a ramp up in significant weather hazards over a short period. With bomb cyclones during winter, we could see a significant increase in wind, rain, snow, sleet, ice and even thundersnow! Our big blizzards tend to occur along the Atlantic coast thanks to bomb cyclones. The cold air over land and warm, moist ocean waters tend to provide the perfect recipe for a bombing storm. If you hear the phrase, typically it means forecasters are expecting a significant storm and locking down the specific hazards may be tricky as the storm outpaces the ability of the models to forecast the storm intensity.

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Preparedness Events in February

American Heart Month

(<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/education-and-awareness/heart-month>)

PLEASE NOTE: In early 2020, the Ready PA monthly newsletter is going digital! To make sure you continue to receive this monthly newsletter, please sign up at:

<https://www.ready.pa.gov/Pages/Subscribe.aspx>

Additional Resources

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency: www.pema.pa.gov

Ready PA: www.ready.pa.gov

SERVPA: www.serv.pa.gov

Federal Emergency Management Agency: www.fema.gov

Office of the State Fire Commissioner: www.osfc.pa.gov

Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture: www.agriculture.pa.gov

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection: www.dep.pa.gov

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation: www.penndot.gov

Pennsylvania Governor's Office of Homeland Security: www.homelandsecurity.pa.gov

Pennsylvania Insurance Department: www.insurance.pa.gov

Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General: www.attorneygeneral.gov

Pennsylvania State Police: www.psp.pa.gov

PA511Connect: www.511pa.com