How to Survive a Blackout: 6 Things You Need to Build an Emergency Tech Kit

When the power goes out, these devices will keep you going during an emergency, be it a hurricane, preemptive wildfire blackout, or other natural disaster.

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As wildfires engulf portions of California, preemptive blackouts are leaving residents in the dark. The Department of Homeland Security has the rundown on ready kit essentials like water, food, and other medical supplies. But there's plenty of tech you can add to that kit that will make a sudden power outage more bearable. Here's how to create your own emergency preparedness tech kit.

1. Portable Chargers and Power Banks

Though smartphone battery life has improved, you're not going to get more than a day's worth on most devices, making a portable power source a must-have accessory.

RAVPower has a 26,800mAh battery with three USB charging ports

for under $50. It promises to charge smartphones about six times and a tablet twice, for an average of nine days of charging before running out of juice.

You should also consider getting two or three smaller 10,000mAh batteries to diversify the power sources. Smaller batteries will also recharge faster, instead of 12-plus hours for one over 20,000mAh. For more options, check our list of best portable chargers and power banks.

What about solar power? If it’s important to keep costs down, you’ll want to stick with power banks to get you through a loss of electricity. In general, the smaller and cheapest solar panels used for phones and small electronics do not provide enough power in a quick-enough fashion to warrant the time or money—especially in an emergency.

There are always caveats to this for special circumstances, like camping, but needing 10+ hours of direct sun to get a partial charge on your phone just isn’t worth the cost quite yet.

2. Power Stations and Portable Generators

The next step up in portable power is a power station or portable generator. These are battery packs that provide close to 50,000mAh of capacity or more and have additional ports like AC outlets. Beyond the obvious benefit of increased capacity, they usually provide enough power for laptops, CPAPs, and small portable refrigerators.

For $150-$200, you’ll get an entry-level unit that should provide plenty of power for a day or two of charging phones, lights, and other gear.

One of the best rated for the price is the Jackery Explorer 160 which is lightweight, portable, and has all the basic

ports you'll need. The Goal Zero Yeti 150 and Rockpals 60W solar charger are also great options.

While solar power isn't worth it for smaller charging devices, these bigger generators can be charged by the larger 50W-100W solar panels and have the means to capture and store energy in case of a prolonged blackout or major emergency. A 50W-60W solar panel will cost around $150-$200 and can recharge an entry-level power station in about 9-12 hours of direct sunlight.

While the Jackery and Goal Zero have their own solar options, the Rockpals may be a better bet. It comes with adapters for each of the major brands' power stations and includes USB ports directly attached. This allows you to use the panels to charge your phone or small power bank much quicker.

3. Lighting

Using your phone's flashlight feature during a blackout will quickly drain its battery, so it's best to have some dedicated light sources.

On the cheaper side is the Onite light bulb, which is under $10 and plugs directly into a USB port. It will run for at least 10-12 hours off a 10,000mAh power bank and provide enough light for an entire room.

For a bit more, the LuminAID Solar Inflatable Lanterns can provide 24 hours of light on a single charge. They are waterproof and conveniently fold for easy storage. While the small solar panels aren't great, they do make some sense here since you can let it charge during the day.

If you can swing it, we recommend picking up more than one of the LuminAID lanterns to provide light to larger areas. There are cheaper lanterns available, but then you get into the question of quality.

More expensive options include BioLite headlamps, which are comfortable and lightweight and can recharge from one of your backup batteries. Don’t underestimate how convenient it is to have a hands-free light, especially in an emergency.

The more expensive BioLite PowerLight Mini won’t provide the same kind of room-filling light as a lantern style, but it is much more compact, offers different lighting options, and promises 52 hours of light.

4. Radio

A decent radio can provide weather and news without an internet connection. The RunningSnail radio includes a light and a small 2,000mAh battery pack. There’s a hand crank and solar panel for power, but it would probably be best to have a few AAA batteries close by just in case.

The Midland ER310, meanwhile, provides a visual alert for severe weather warnings. It also has an ultrasonic dog whistle to help round up pets that may have run off amidst the chaos.

5. Additional Tech to Add

If you really want to go all out, the BioLight CampStove 2 can burn sticks, pellets, or pine cones to produce heat and create 3W of power for real-time charging or storage in its 2,600mAh battery.

A DemerBox, meanwhile, is essentially a Pelican Case with Bluetooth speakers and a battery for device charging. It’s waterproof and crushproof, can hold valuables or supplies during an emergency, and the speaker can play emergency announcements or offer up a little entertainment when needed. It’s certainly a luxury in most instances, but a well-built and potentially key piece of gear in the right circumstance.

6. Emergency Phone

If you have an old cell phone that still powers on, don’t get rid of it. It is required by law that all phones can call 911, even without a cellular plan. Instead of putting that old smartphone with a cracked screen in a drawer somewhere, add it to your emergency supplies. Just make sure the device is fully charged and keep it turned off until you need it.

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