



NEWS from SEMO

NEW YORK STATE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OFFICE
1220 Washington Avenue, Building 22, Albany, NY 12226-2251

David A. Paterson, Governor

John R. Gibb, Director

CONTACT:
Dennis Michalski
(518) 292-2310
CA@semo.state.ny.us

FOR RELEASE:
IMMEDIATE, Wednesday
May 5, 2010

BE PREPARED FOR POWER OUTAGES DURING SEVERE WEATHER MONTHS

With the severe weather season upon us and start of hurricane/coastal storm season less than a month away, the New York State Emergency Management Office (SEMO) today advised New Yorkers to be prepared for and know what to do in the event storms knock out electric power.

“While we have good advance warning of severe weather, we can’t stop severe summer storms from happening,” said John R. Gibb, SEMO Director. “But we can mitigate the effect they have on our lives when they cut electric power for several hours or several days. Knowing what to do and when to do it is important for everyone during an emergency.”

The SEMO Director offered this advice today as part of New York State’s participation in the Great Hurricane Blowout. This new innovative program, developed by the Federal Alliance for Safe Homes, offers a building-block approach to preparedness for the 2010 hurricane season and all hazards. Through the end of May, SEMO is releasing through its website – www.semo.state.ny.us – simple preparedness steps that, when completed, will help residents to become better prepared for future storms and emergencies.

In New York State, the hurricane season traditionally begins June 1 and runs through November 30. While hurricanes are predominantly coastal storms, in the past they have impacted areas of the State hundreds of miles from the ocean such as Tropical Storms Agnes in the Southern Tier (1972) and Floyd in the Hudson Valley (1999).

Severe Weather Awareness Week is being observed in the State this week as well. As part of the week’s observance, State agencies such as SEMO and the State Education Department are again participating with the National Weather Service and the New York State Broadcasters Association in the annual communication drill tomorrow afternoon at approximately 1:45 p.m.

The communication drills give National Weather Service staff the opportunity to practice skills usually applied under stress. Externally, the statewide drill gives public safety officials, the broadcast media and all New Yorkers the opportunity to test their planned methods of receiving emergency weather messages. It also affords the opportunity to test plans for responding to a weather emergency.

Gibb reminded New Yorkers that during an emergency, such as March’s severe storms, electricity, water, heat and air conditioning or telephone service may not work. He said that individuals and families should have an emergency plan in place and emphasized that collecting emergency supplies now can save precious time in the event that residents must evacuate or go without electricity, water or heat for an extended period of time.

-more-

Here are some simple steps to take to be prepared for a possible loss of electricity:

- If you use medication that requires refrigeration, most can be kept in a closed refrigerator for several hours without a problem - check with your physician or pharmacist.
- If you have space in your refrigerator or freezer, consider filling plastic containers with water, leaving an inch of space inside each one – this will help keep food cold if the power goes out. A half full freezer will hold food safely for up to 24 hours. A full freezer will hold food safely for 48 hours. Do not open the freezer door if you can avoid it.
- Plan to have an alternative cooking source, such as a camp stove or outdoor grill. Follow appropriate safety rules for its use outside the residence.
- Consider buying a generator and follow the rules for using it outside the residence. Before installing a generator, be sure to properly disconnect from your utility electrical service. If possible, have your generator installed by a qualified electrician.
- If you have a computer, back up files and operating systems regularly. Turn off all computers, monitors, and other devices when they are not being used.
- If you have an electric garage door opener, find and know how to use the manual release level.
- If you have a telephone instrument or system that requires electricity to work, plan for alternate communication such as a standard telephone handset, cellular telephone, or radio.

Should you experience loss of power, follow these recommendations:

- Turn off major appliances to prevent damage from a possible surge when the power comes back on - keep one light turned on so you know when power returns.
- Call your utility provider to notify them of the outage.
- Check to see if your neighbors have power.
- Use only flashlights for emergency lighting -- candles pose the risk of fire.
- Keep your refrigerator and freezer doors shut to keep food from spoiling. When in doubt, throw it out!
- Do not use a charcoal grill indoors and do not use a gas stove for heat - they could give off harmful levels of carbon monoxide.
- In hot weather, take steps to remain cool. Move to the lowest level of the house. Open the windows to allow for plenty of ventilation. Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing. Drink plenty of water.
- If you are in a tall building, take the stairs and move to the lowest level of the building.
- If trapped in an elevator, wait for assistance. Do not attempt to force the doors open. Remain patient - there is plenty of air and the interior of the elevator is designed for passenger safety.
- Remember to provide fresh, cool water for your pets.
- Eliminate unnecessary travel, especially by car. Traffic signals will stop working during an outage, creating traffic congestion and dangerous driving conditions. If you must drive during a blackout, remember to obey the 4-way stop rule at intersections with non-functioning traffic signals.
- Remember that equipment such as automated teller machines (ATMs) and elevators may not be working.

For more information on electric power outages, hurricane preparedness and what you can do to protect yourself and your family, visit www.semo.state.ny.us and www.nyalert.gov.

#####