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Family Grid-Down Preparedness Plan

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Purpose and how to use this plan

This plan helps a household get through a power outage lasting anywhere from one week to one year. The tiers build on each other: finish one before you start the next.

- **The tiers are cumulative.** Each one assumes the tier before it is in place. A 3-month plan is a 1-month plan plus new capabilities, not a bigger pile of supplies.
- **The strategy changes with duration.** For 1 week to 1 month, you get by on what you have stored. At 3 months, storage alone becomes impractical, so you need ways to resupply. At 6 months to 1 year, you depend on producing your own food and water and on your community. No household gets through a year alone.
- **Spend on probability first.** The most likely outage is regional and lasts days to a couple of weeks, caused by storms, heat, earthquakes or wildfire. Get to Tier 2 before spending heavily on Tier 4 or 5.
- **Adapt it to your home.** Climate, housing type (apartment, suburb, rural), medical needs, and whether your water comes from a utility or a well matter more than any generic list. Annex A is a worksheet for doing this.
- **Review it twice a year.** Rotate food, water, fuel and batteries on fixed dates. Daylight-saving changes in spring and fall make easy reminders.

Quantities assume an adult needs about 2,000 kcal and 1 gallon of water a day. Scale up for active adults, hot climates, nursing mothers and animals.

Planning assumptions: what fails, and when

In a long outage, systems fail in a predictable order: first everything that runs on grid power, then everything that runs on backup fuel, then supply chains and services that depend on people. The timings below are typical, not guaranteed. Check how your own utilities and services hold up.

When	What typically fails or degrades	What it means for a household
Hours 0–24	Lights, refrigeration, electric heat and cooling, well pumps, garage doors, home internet, traffic signals, card readers and ATMs	No-cook food, cash, manual workarounds; the freezer stays safe ~24–48 h if kept shut
Days 1–3	Cell towers drain their batteries; gas stations can't pump; grocery shelves empty; sewer lift stations back up in some areas	Phone coverage becomes spotty; whatever fuel you have is all you get; possible sewage backflow
Days 3–14	City water pressure may drop as backup generators run low; pharmacies and clinics close or ration; refrigerated medicines spoil	Stored water and a toilet plan become essential; prescription gaps start
Weeks 2–4	Fuel deliveries to critical-facility generators get strained; most businesses close; payroll and benefits payments get disrupted	Income may stop; resupply is local and informal
Months 1–3	Food distribution depends on government or relief logistics; untreated water causes illness; tensions rise in dense areas	Water treatment, sanitation and community ties decide outcomes
Months 3–12	The economy is restructured around whatever power is restored; deferred medical and dental needs pile up	Home production (food, water, heat) plus mutual aid; your skills matter more than your stockpile

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What this means for planning: the first two weeks are mostly about water, warmth and medication. After that, the real problems are sanitation and resupply. The Washington State Emergency Management Division asks every household to be "2 Weeks Ready", meaning 14 gallons of water per person plus two weeks of non-perishable food (WA EMD).

Tier 0: Foundations (do these first, they cost almost nothing)

The cheapest preparation is information and agreements. Most households can finish Tier 0 in one weekend.

- ☐ **Know your dependencies.** Where does your water come from (city, or a well with an electric pump)? How is your home heated? What does your sewer depend on? Which medicines need refrigeration? Write the answers down.
- ☐ **Assign roles.** Who handles water, food, medical, communications and children or elders? Who backs up each person?
- ☐ **Learn your shutoffs.** Main water valve, gas meter, electrical panel. Keep the right tool beside each one.
- ☐ **Go to paper.** Print contacts, medication lists, insurance and account numbers, and local maps. Keep copies in a waterproof folder and in a go-bag.
- ☐ **Agree on triggers.** Decide in advance when you shelter in place, when you go to a fallback location, and who decides (see Communications and family rally plan).
- ☐ **Sign up for alerts.** County emergency alerts, NOAA weather alerts, and USGS ShakeAlert on the West Coast.
- ☐ **Register medical dependencies.** If someone relies on oxygen, CPAP, dialysis or powered mobility devices, enroll them in your utility's medical or priority-restoration program and tell local emergency management.
- ☐ **Meet two neighbors.** Swap phone numbers and find out what skills and equipment each of you has. In outages longer than a week, this matters more than any single purchase.
- ☐ **Do a dry run.** Shut off the main breaker for one evening (4–6 hours). Whatever breaks or is missing is your shopping list.

Tier 1: 1-week outage (shelter in place on what you have stored)

The goal is seven days of comfort and safety with no outside help. For a family of four this costs roughly $300–$800 if you have none of it already. Most of it is food you would eat anyway.

Domain	Target (per person unless noted)	Notes
Water	7 gal, plus extra for pets	Sealed jugs or 5–7 gal containers; fill bathtubs when a storm is forecast (for flushing, not drinking)
Food	7 days of food that needs no cooking or only a simple stove	Canned goods, peanut butter, oats, crackers, shelf-stable milk; eat the fridge first, then the freezer, then the pantry. Manual can opener
Cooking	Camp stove + fuel for 7 days, used outdoors	Propane or butane; never use charcoal or camp stoves indoors

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Domain	Target (per person unless noted)	Notes
Heat / cooling	One room you can keep livable	Cold climates: sleeping bags rated to 20°F, wool layers, an indoor-rated propane heater only with a CO alarm. Hot climates: shade, battery fans, a cooling-center plan
Light & power	Headlamp per person, lanterns, spare batteries, 2+ power banks	A 500–1,000 Wh portable power station runs phones, radios, CPAP and lights for days
Medical	2 weeks of prescriptions, a full first-aid kit	Cooler plan for refrigerated meds; spare glasses; OTC pain, allergy and stomach medicines
Sanitation	Bucket toilet, heavy bags, absorbent (cat litter or sawdust), wipes, sanitizer	Matters if city sewer or your septic pump fails
Communications	Battery or crank NOAA weather radio, FRS/GMRS handhelds, printed contact list	Text messages get through when calls don't
Money	Cash in small bills, about 1 week of spending	Card readers and ATMs go down with the power
Safety	CO alarms (battery), smoke alarms, fire extinguishers	Home fires and carbon monoxide poisoning spike during outages

About generators: a portable generator is a Tier 1 convenience, not a requirement. If you have one, run it outdoors at least 20 feet from the house, with the exhaust pointed away. Never run it in a garage. Never plug it into a wall outlet to backfeed the house; that can kill utility line crews.

Tier 2: 1-month outage (storage plus water treatment)

Tier 2 introduces the first capability you need beyond storage: making untrusted water safe to drink. Storing a full month of water is impractical for most homes. Store two weeks' worth and be able to treat the rest.

Domain	Target	Notes
Water	14 gal stored per person, plus treatment for the rest of the month	Gravity filter (ceramic or hollow fiber) + unscented bleach or tablets; identify two sources nearby (rain barrels, stream, pond, pool)
Food	30 days, ~60,000 kcal per person	"Store what you eat" and rotate it; add rice, beans, oats, pasta, canned meat, oil, salt, sugar, multivitamins
Cooking	Fuel for 30 days	Plan two 20-lb propane cylinders per household (a rough estimate) or a wood-fired option; a pressure cooker cuts fuel use for beans and rice
Heat	A heat source for the whole season that doesn't need grid power	Wood stove with 1+ cord of seasoned wood, or enough propane; otherwise a pre-arranged place to relocate
Power	Selected loads (fridge, freezer, well pump, lights, communications), not the whole house	Run the generator in 2–3 hour blocks; dual-fuel (propane) models store fuel longer; stabilize gasoline. An electrician-installed transfer switch or interlock. Better still: solar panels + a 2–5 kWh battery

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Domain	Target	Notes
Medical	30–90 days of prescriptions where insurance and the prescriber allow it	First aid/CPR and Stop the Bleed training for 2+ household members; trauma kit; dental temporary-filling kit
Sanitation	30 days of bags and absorbent, or a composting toilet setup	Plan for trash: it piles up quickly once pickup stops
Communications	One licensed amateur radio operator (Technician) in the household or nearby	Join or set up a neighborhood check-in on a set channel and schedule
Money	Cash for 2–4 weeks of essentials	Paper copies of insurance, deeds, IDs and account information
Community	A neighborhood list: who has which skills, tools, generators and medical needs	Agree on how to share water sources, fuel and equipment before you need to

Rotation discipline matters more as stockpiles grow. Write purchase or fill dates on everything and use the oldest first.

Tier 3: 3-month outage (sustainable sources, not bigger piles)

At three months, stored water and fuel can't keep up. Your plan moves to renewable sources and to working with other households. A 3-month outage could also be one you can't stay put through, so this tier includes a real decision about relocating.

Domain	Target	What changes from Tier 2
Water	A renewable source + treatment for ~90+ gal per person	Rainwater catchment off the roof; a hand pump or solar pump for a well; a large-capacity gravity filter with spare elements
Food	90 days, ~180,000 kcal per person	Bulk staples in sealed buckets (rice, wheat or flour, beans, oats, oil, salt, honey, powdered milk); a starter garden and seeds; learn to cook from scratch
Heat & cooking	Wood as the main fuel where possible	2–4+ cords for a heating season; manual saws, axes, splitting tools; a chimney cleaning plan
Power	Solar + battery sized for essential loads, with no fuel dependence	A generator becomes backup only; fuel resupply can't be counted on past 30 days
Medical	Deeper skills and supplies	Wilderness First Aid or higher; antiseptics, wound care, a reference manual (e.g., Where There Is No Doctor); plans for chronic conditions if refills stop
Sanitation	A durable system	A composting toilet or properly sited latrine (well downhill from any water source); handwashing stations; laundry by hand
Communications	Regional reach	HF amateur radio for news from beyond your area; a battery shortwave receiver
Income	A household budget that assumes no paycheck	Pay down debt now; keep pantry staples you can barter or share
Community	A working mutual-aid group (5–15 households)	Shared watch, shared skills (medical, mechanical, gardening), and a plan for helping vulnerable neighbors

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Domain	Target	What changes from Tier 2
Decision	A written stay-or-relocate decision	Who goes where, by which route, carrying what; for suburban and urban households, often a rural relative's place

Tier 4: 6-month outage (production and preservation)

A six-month outage covers at least one full growing season or one full winter. Survival now depends on producing and preserving food, and on keeping tools and people working. Households in cities or apartments can rarely reach this tier on their own. For them, Tier 4 means a pre-arranged partnership with a rural household.

- **Food production:** a garden big enough to supply a real share of calories (potatoes, squash, beans, corn, greens), not just salads. Keep non-hybrid seed that you know how to save. Small livestock (chickens for eggs, rabbits for meat) turns scraps and forage into protein.
- **Preservation:** canning equipment and lids (lids are the item that runs out), a solar or wood-fired dehydrator, a root cellar or cool storage, salt for curing.
- **Bulk storage to bridge to the harvest:** roughly 150 lb of grain and 30 lb of legumes per adult for six months, scaled from the common one-year guideline of about 300 lb grain and 60 lb legumes.
- **Wild food:** fishing and hunting gear, current licenses and real practice. Learn the edible plants in your area from a local course, not from an app.
- **Tools and repair:** hand tools that don't need power, sharpening gear, spare parts for pumps and filters, bicycles with tubes and patch kits.
- **Health:** dental care plans, sanitation discipline (most deaths in long disasters come from disease), and attention to mental health. Routines, work, and school for children.
- **Clothing and footwear:** durable work boots, wool, rain gear, sewing and mending kits.

Tier 5: 1-year outage (community resilience)

A year without the grid is a civilization-scale event, and no household gets through it alone. Plan this tier as a way of living and a set of community capabilities, not as a supply list.

- **A full year of food:** either stored staples for a year (~300 lb grain and 60 lb legumes per adult, plus oil, salt and sugar), or proven production, ideally both. Breeding livestock and saved seed carry you into year two.
- **Year-round water and heat:** a renewable water source and a wood supply you can cut, split and season yourself, a year ahead.
- **Shared infrastructure:** a community well, a shared solar system or microgrid, a tool library, a shared medical kit and a skilled caregiver.
- **People and skills:** among your group, cover medicine, mechanics and small-engine repair, carpentry, food growing and preserving, animal husbandry, radio communications, and teaching. Cross-train so no skill rests on one person.
- **Governance:** simple agreements about sharing, conflict resolution and decisions. Mutual aid lasts longer when the rules are agreed before people are under strain.

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- **Morale and meaning:** schooling for children, shared meals, music, faith or other community traditions. Long outages are as much a psychological test as a physical one.

An honest note: what helps most past three months is where you live and who you live near. Bigger stockpiles help less. A rural household with water, wood, land and neighbors is far better placed than a well-stocked city apartment. For many families, the most important Tier 5 decision is which relative's home becomes the group's base.

Communications and family rally plan

Every household in the family should agree on how to reach each other once phones stop working, and on when to regroup. Use a PACE plan: Primary, Alternate, Contingency, Emergency. Each method is tried only after the one above it fails.

Level	Method	Works when	Agreement to make
Primary	Cell call or text	Local towers still on battery or backup power	Text first; keep messages short
Alternate	Out-of-area contact (one relative far away)	Local networks are jammed but long-distance service works	Everyone checks in with that person, who passes news on
Contingency	GMRS/FRS (local) and amateur radio (regional)	Cell service is down	Agree on channels and frequencies, plus fixed check-in times (e.g., 09:00 and 21:00 local, 15-minute windows)
Emergency	A physical message point and rally location	Everything else has failed	A note left in a set place at home; a named rally point; a family base for long outages

Triggers to regroup. Agree on these in advance so no one has to decide under stress:

1. Outage expected to exceed 7 days, with water or heat failing at home: move to the nearest family household with water and heat.
2. Outage exceeds 30 days, or civil disorder in your area: move to the family base (usually the most rural, best-supplied home), if the route is safe.
3. No contact for 72 hours: the designated person checks on vulnerable members in person, if it is safe to travel.

For each household, record the route to the family base, a backup route, and the fuel needed to get there. Keep enough fuel in the car for that trip at all times. Amateur radio users can also monitor the national 2-meter simplex calling frequency, 146.520 MHz.

Special considerations

The people and animals who depend on power or on daily care decide how long a household can stay put. Plan around them first.

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Who	Main risk	What to plan
Powered medical devices (oxygen, CPAP, dialysis, ventilator)	Device failure within hours	Battery runtime tested; a power station or generator sized for the device; enrollment in utility and county medical lists; a relocation point with power
Refrigerated medicines (insulin, some biologics)	Spoilage in heat	Evaporative cooling wallets, a cooler rotation plan, and a pharmacist's guidance on room-temperature limits for each medicine
Infants and young children	Formula, diapers, warmth	Ready-to-feed formula (no water needed), 4+ weeks of diapers, layered sleep clothing; quiet games and routines
Elderly members	Cold or heat stress, falls in the dark, cognitive confusion	Lighting by the bed and along paths, warm room priority, a daily check-in person
Pets	Food and water shortfall	Same tiers as people: food and water for each tier's duration, plus carriers and records if you have to relocate
Livestock	Water first, then feed, then shelter	Approximate daily water: goats 2–4 gal (more when lactating), chickens ~1 pint, rabbits ~1 quart, a large dog ~1 gal; hay and feed to cover the tier; a manual way to move water when an electric pump fails

One approach that works well for an extended family: name one person to coordinate medical needs across every household. That person tracks each member's prescriptions, devices and refill dates.

Community annexes (optional)

A household or community can add its own annex covering local hazards, the routes in and out, and how long outages there typically last. OmniCORE community instances keep these annexes alongside their other local planning material instead of in the published plan.

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Annex A: Household planning worksheet

Each household copies this table and fills it in. "Days covered" is an honest estimate of how long you could last today. The gap between that and your target tier is your shopping and training list.

Household profile: people ___ · pets/livestock ___ · water source (city / well) ___ · heat source ___ · powered medical needs ___ · family base / fallback location ___

Domain	Days covered today	Target tier	Next step to close the gap	Owner	Target date
Water (storage + treatment)					
Food					
Cooking fuel					
Heat / cooling					
Light & power					
Medical & prescriptions					
Sanitation					
Communications					
Cash & documents					
Pets / livestock					
Community / neighbors					
Skills & training					

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Sources

- Washington EMD: 2 Weeks Ready checklist

Quantities not linked above (fuel use, livestock and pet water, food storage weights) are working estimates from general preparedness practice. Check them against your own equipment and animals.

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