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Bill Husted's  
**TECHNOBUDDY**

## Be prepared for inevitable power outages

By [BILL HUSTED](#)

Cox News Service

July 11, 2005

It wasn't difficult deciding on today's topic. Limbs are down in my yard. Hundreds of thousands are without electricity in the South because of Dennis' powerfully bad breath.

Hurricane Dennis wasn't as violent as some that came before. But it was strong enough to us that — once the electricity goes out — many of our high-tech gadgets are transformed into expensive paperweights.

The lights go out regularly at my home with lesser excuses than a hurricane. Suicidal squirrels on the power line, cars that crash into utility poles and faulty transformers come along a lot more frequently than a hurricane. Odds are you'll face some dark nights in the next few months no matter the weather. There are ways technology — most of it of the discount store variety — can make power outages brighter at your house.

First, you'll need some light. I know having a flashlight or two around the house seems like a no-brainer. But it's my guess you've felt brain dead on more than one windy occasion.

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Besides, there's a better solution. Pick up a couple of battery-powered camping lanterns next time you're out. Equip them with alkaline batteries (rechargeables lose their power even when unused). That way you'll have a broader and softer beam of light that can be used for reading or normal household activities. Buy them now. If you've ever looked for one during the days before or after a major power outage, you'll understand why.

Next, make sure you have at least one old-fashioned wired telephone in your house. While telephone lines can go down in a storm, most often service remains even when the power is out. However, if all your phones are the wireless variety, they won't work when the power is out. A disaster is when you need a working phone the most. And you can pick up a regular telephone for \$12 or so.

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Add a battery-powered radio or even one of the relatively inexpensive battery-powered televisions to your survival kit.

Especially during times when dangerous weather is in your neighborhood, you'll want to keep up with the news. When roads are icy or tornadoes are brewing, broadcast news reports can save your life.

Now let me offer a trick that's helped me. There have been several times when power has been out at my home for days at a time. I would sit in a well-lighted newsroom and wonder whether power had returned to my neighborhood. After all, there was no sense stocking up at the grocery on the way home if there's no power for the refrigerator.

So I used a \$30 gadget to check the power situation even when no one was at home. I simply hooked up an answering machine. Since the machine uses AC power, the phone rang endlessly if there was no juice. But when power returned, it picked up the phone. Normally I use a remote answering service. But the answering machine comes out of the closet when bad weather moves in.

If you live in an area where tornadoes are relatively common, you're an excellent candidate for a weather radio. Emergency broadcasts from the National Weather Service automatically turn the radio on and sound an alarm. I usually don't mention specific stores, but since Radio Shack stores can be found almost anywhere, they are a good choice for that kind of shopping.

Add a UPS — an uninterruptible power supply — to your shopping list. It will protect your computer when the power goes out. You'll have enough time to shut down in a normal way during a power failure. You can get a good one for \$100 or so. While the UPS won't let you spend hours at your computer during a power failure — a laptop is the machine of choice for that — it is a sensible addition for home computing.

Some of you will follow this advice, some won't. That's OK. But do me a favor and pay close attention to the next two tips. If you have a home generator for electricity, make sure it is professionally installed. Some home-brew installations are dangerous for power company

employees who work to get power back on. A faulty installation can send electricity to power lines outside your home. A lineman, believing he is working on a dead line, could be electrocuted.

Never use gas-powered camping lights or stoves powered by gas or charcoal inside your house. Carbon monoxide can accumulate and kill your family.

I hope you're reading this on a day with sunshine and gentle breezes. It would be an excellent day to pick up some of the items on my survival list. Don't wait until you are powerless.

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