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PUC Offers Winter Storm Safety Tips

Residents Reminded to Report Outages, Use Caution During Severe Weather, and Give Utility Crews Room to Work

HARRISBURG – As the first major winter storm system of the season moves across the Commonwealth, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) reminds households of the steps they can take to prepare for, and recover safely from, storm-related power outages.

Additionally, the PUC cautions residents to give utility crews ample room to perform their repair work – for your protection as well as theirs – and to use extra care when traveling, watching for utility crews working along streets and roads and slowing down in work areas.

***“The combination of snow, ice, high winds and falling temperatures has the potential to disrupt utility service,” said PUC Chairman Gladys Brown Dutrieuille.
“Time spent on planning and preparing before a storm can go a long way toward keeping yourself and your family safe when severe weather hits.”***

Storm Preparation Tips

The PUC encourages residents to consider the following tips before a storm strikes your community:

- **Know Your Utility Hotlines** - Write down, print or save toll-free outage hotlines for your electric utility and/or your natural gas utility, which are listed on your monthly bills and posted on the PUC website.

- **Save Utility Website Address** - Your utility's outage reporting system can provide updates on repair and restoration efforts. Bookmark these electric utility outage sites and natural gas company websites.
- **Keep Your Cell Phone Charged** – A well-charged phone will keep you in contact with your utility, other emergency services and family members during any power outage.
- **Secure Supplies** – Keep necessary food, medicine and other supplies on-hand, including batteries for flashlights.

Power Outage Tips

Should you lose power during a storm, keep the following points in mind:

- **Call Your [Utility Hotline](#) to Report Outages** - Do not assume that the utility already knows about your outage or that others have already called.
- **Keep Clear of Wires** - Do NOT touch or approach any fallen lines.
- **Stay Away from Objects or Puddles** in contact with downed power lines.
- **Do NOT Try to Remove Trees or Limbs** from power lines.
- **Pre-Charge Cellular Phones** or keep a portable cell phone charger on hand. Plan to use a corded phone, cordless phones won't work without electricity.
- **Do NOT Call 9-1-1 to Report Power Outages** – report those to your utility. Calling 9-1-1 to report non-emergency issues like service outages can take resources away from other emergencies. SPECIAL NOTE: If you see a downed power line, immediately call your electric utility and/or 9-1-1.

Safety While Waiting for Power to be Restored

Households should consider the following tips to help stay safe until power is restored:

- **Use Flashlights or Battery-Operated Lanterns** for emergency lighting. Do not use candles or other potential fire hazards.
- **Turn Off Lights and Electrical Appliances** except for the refrigerator and freezer. When power comes back on, it may come back with momentary "surges" or "spikes" that can damage equipment.
- **Leave One Light On** - After you turn the lights off, turn one lamp on so you will know when power is restored. Wait at least 15 minutes after power is restored before turning on other appliances.
- **Use Generators Safely** - If you use a generator, do NOT run it inside a home or garage or anywhere close to a window or vent. Also, connect the equipment you want to operate 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. [Additional generator tips are available here.](#)
- **Check on Elderly Neighbors** and those with special needs who might need additional assistance.

Natural Gas Safety Tips

Consumers using natural gas appliances can also be impacted by storms:

- **Check Gas Appliances** - Electric power outages can affect home appliances that operate on natural gas. If they do not function properly when power is restored, call a professional for service.
- **Evacuate if You Smell Natural Gas** - Get everyone out of the building immediately.
- **Leave the Door Open and Do NOT Use Phones**; do NOT switch lights or appliances on or off; and do NOT take any other action while inside the building.
- **Call 9-1-1 from a safe location** - After you are safely outside, call 9-1-1 from your cell phone or neighbor's home.

During storm emergencies, the PUC continuously monitors utility issues and works closely with the Governor's Office and the other state agencies involved in Pennsylvania's coordinated storm response. Across the state, there is extensive behind-the-scenes work when storms are forecast, focused on quickly addressing problems and restoring service as rapidly as possible. Utilities are putting their severe weather plans into motion; crews and equipment are being positioned for quick response to outages; and communication with emergency management coordinators is enhanced.

The Commission also highlighted [a short video highlighting storm outage heating safety tips](#), available on the PUC YouTube channel.

About the PUC

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission balances the needs of consumers and utilities; ensures safe and reliable utility service at reasonable rates; protects the public interest; educates consumers to make independent and informed utility choices; furthers economic development; and fosters new technologies and competitive markets in an environmentally sound manner.

Visit the PUC's website at www.puc.pa.gov for recent news releases and video of select proceedings. You can also follow us on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube. Search for the "Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission" or "PA PUC" on your favorite social media channel for updates on utility issues and other helpful consumer information.