

Fact sheet

# Critical works

## Why your power may go off

**Our energy grid needs regular maintenance to keep the lights on and gas flowing.**

**These critical works are essential to ensure the energy system can operate safely and equipment keeps functioning.**

Some works are planned in advance, such as when equipment is reaching the end of its operating life or when minor faults are detected that are likely to lead to further failures. Please follow your local network's guide on how to prepare.

Other works respond to damaged equipment from storms, fires or other natural disasters.

During the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, energy networks are doing everything they can to keep the power on, gas flowing and the energy system safe and reliable. This is particularly important at this time for essential services like hospitals.





## What works are being done?

**Like any system, components of the electricity network have a limited operating life in which they can function safely and efficiently.**

Most equipment is also subject to environmental factors such as storms, lightning, fires and damage from traffic accidents or falling debris.

## Why your power may go off

**There is a need to continue critical maintenance to protect lives, prevent damage to properties and keep the power on for the future.**

A lot of works cannot be safely done with live power lines or gas flowing through pipes.

Referred to as a planned outage, this critical preventive maintenance is needed to ensure customers continue to receive a reliable supply of energy. It means that the supply of electricity or gas will sometimes be temporarily interrupted so the work can be done safely and efficiently.

Networks know planned outages are inconvenient for customers, particularly given the current crisis, and the many people working from home. However, the work being undertaken is essential to ensure a safe, reliable and secure energy system for everyone.

For some critical work, power will be disrupted for a few hours. This is designed to avoid potentially catastrophic faults that could cause long term outages and put customers' safety at risk.

## Please respect the crews performing these critical works.

These frontline energy workers are doing their jobs in this difficult time to protect you and your families and ensure the safe and reliable supply of energy.

As essential workers, our crews may be required to work closely together. Careful risk assessments are being done to ensure the work can be completed safely.

It is likely that restrictions relating to COVID-19 will continue for several months. Networks are taking steps during this time to minimise the number and duration of disruptions whilst ensuring that critical infrastructure, such as hospitals, have secure supplies.

## Like servicing your car, work is needed to replace equipment before it breaks.

These critical preventative works avoid faults later that may damage property, injure people and result in longer outages.

Equipment may also need to be upgraded to continue to deliver a high-quality service to customers. For example, residential development, such as large apartment buildings, in an area may place greater load on the local network. To maintain a reliable and efficient network, components may need to be upgraded to keep the lights on or the gas flowing efficiently.

Advances in technology, such as the rapid uptake of household solar PV and batteries, will also require upgrades to the local networks in some areas. This is because the network was not originally designed to handle the load from all the solar being exported back into the grid.

We are moving rapidly from a system dominated by a few large-scale thermal generators to one with more decentralised generation from millions of rooftops. This is a big change, but one networks are already facilitating.



## Will I be notified before an outage?

**Details of planned interruptions are sent to customers with as much notice as possible – usually several days in advance.**

This notice will often be via text message, so ensure your energy retailer has your up-to-date contact information. Customers will be advised of the date, time and expected duration of the outage.

In the event of an emergency situation, your network may not be able to give you adequate notice.

## How long will the power be off for an unplanned outage?

**For unplanned outages, networks work hard to have your supply restored as soon as possible, but sometimes the complexity and severity of the issue can result in longer outages.**

Visit your networks **outage information page** for up to date information on any outages in your area. Networks will often keep customers updated via social media.

If you are currently experiencing an electricity outage that is not displayed on the network's website, please call the faults line listed on your energy bill.



## What to do in the event of an outage

**For a variety of reasons, customers may find themselves spending increased time at home as a result of the COVID-19 situation. Power outages, both planned and unplanned could affect your household activities. Below are some simple tips to consider to best prepare for an outage:**



**Life support systems:** If you or someone in your home are on a life support system that requires electricity supply, you should have a contingency plan for any power interruptions (please ensure that you have registered this with your energy retailer).



**Keeping food safe:** Only open fridge and freezer doors when absolutely necessary as this will keep the food and air temperatures colder for longer. Information on food safety can be found on your state health department website.



**Electric gates and garage doors:** Most systems have an override (key or lever) to allow manual operation during a power outage. Check your user manual or contact the manufacturer for instructions. Some systems have battery backup and will continue to operate for a short time.



**Working from home:** Save work and file back-ups. If any of your computer has an auto-save function, consider how frequently it operates. If working remotely, consider your options for file back-ups. Ensure your phone and any equipment you may need for your home office, such as a laptop, is charged.



### **Electrical and electronic equipment:**

Switch off and unplug sensitive electrical and electronic equipment. This may include computers and audio-visual equipment. Look for manual override options on any electrical equipment that may restrict access in and out of the house, e.g. front doors.



**Generators:** Use generators with extreme caution and only to power appliances directly. Do not connect the output to the house switchboard or wiring as this can cause a safety risk for our workers.



**Household alarms:** Many security alarm systems have temporary back-up batteries that will keep your premises protected for a minimum of four hours if your battery is in good condition. When power is restored, your alarm system should automatically reconnect to mains power. Some alarms will indicate that your power supply was interrupted, but alarm systems are usually not triggered by power outages. Consult your instruction manual or contact your alarm installer or manufacturer for more information.



**Solar power systems:** Automatically shut down if mains power goes off and restart when power is restored. For more information including requirement for owners of solar PV and other generating sources check your networks website.

## What if I smell gas?

**If you smell gas in the street or on your property before or including the gas meter, you should call your network emergency number located on your gas bill or via their website.**

If, however, you believe the leak to be after the meter on a section of pipe work connecting your appliances, or on the appliance itself, you should contact a licensed gas fitter to rectify the problem. Remember, any person undertaking work involving gas must be appropriately licensed.

If you smell gas inside your building or home:

- Turn off all appliances and pilot lights.
- Turn off your supply at the gas meter.
- Open all doors and windows for ventilation.
- Contact your licensed gas fitter to repair the escape and relight appliances.

### Remember:

- **Do not** look for a gas leak with a naked flame or other ignition source.
- **Do not** operate electrical equipment close to a gas leak.
- **Don't** turn on or switch off any lights, use a telephone, or use a flashlight, at the risk of causing a spark that could start a gas fire.
- **Don't** smoke, light matches, or use a cigarette lighter inside or while on the property.