Before the Blackout

Why Your Family Needs a Plan Before Everyday Life Stops Working

A practical beginning for families on a budget

Marty & Sparky | The FortressReady Team

November 2026

A LETTER TO THE READER

Before you read

Your family needs water, food, shelter, essential care, and a way to find one another. Those needs continue through a power failure, a dangerous storm, an evacuation, or a wider crisis. This short book asks you to look honestly at what would happen if the services you use every day became unavailable, then begin a practical plan you can afford.

The opening household story is fictional. It combines possible problems to make decisions visible; it does not predict that every outage will cause every failure described. The historical events and public guidance that follow are documented, with numbered sources at the end. News was checked through November 15, 2026.

We cannot tell you when the next emergency will reach your household. We can help you stop leaving every answer until it does.

Inside this book

- An ordinary evening becomes a family emergency
- What real failures have already taught us
- Why governments and military planners prepare
- The decisions that cannot wait for a shopping trip
- Your first actions and a printable family readiness card
- The next step toward your family's first 72 hours

READ THIS WITH A PEN NEARBY

Before you finish, choose one useful action and put a time beside it. Reading should change something in your home.

AN IMAGINED HOUSEHOLD SCENARIO

It was an ordinary evening

The lights go out while dinner is still half-made.

For a moment, nobody moves. The refrigerator stops humming. A child asks whether the television is broken. Through the kitchen window, you can see that the houses across the street are dark too.

You reach for your phone. Seventeen percent.

There is a flashlight somewhere. You remember buying batteries, but not whether they fit it. Your partner is across town. The first message does not send. You try again.

At first, it feels like an inconvenience. You have been through outages before. Someone will fix it. Dinner can wait.

Then the questions start arriving. A child needs a drink. The tap has lost pressure. Your phone is now the brightest light in the room, so its battery has a second job. The bag you would take if you had to leave is still a collection of things in different closets.

You could go to a relative's house. Do they have power? Are they home? Can they take the dog? You never asked. You could drive to a store. Is it open? Will the card reader work? Is the route clear?

Your child asks when the lights will come back.

You do not know. That is understandable. What unsettles you is realizing how many other answers you do not have.

THE QUESTION BENEATH THE OUTAGE

If your usual systems became unavailable tonight, what would your family need before morning?

THE SCENARIO CONTINUES

The needs do not stop

The outage has no concern for the appointment tomorrow, the infant's feeding routine, or the fact that the grocery money is already tight.

The house is getting colder. An older relative calls before the network becomes unreliable. Their essential equipment needs electricity. They want to know where to go.

You want to help. You also need to know whether your own household can safely stay where it is. You cannot solve either question by refreshing a screen.

Imagine, instead, that you had made a few arrangements last weekend. A working light is in its place. Drinking water is stored. There is familiar food that does not need cooking. The person responsible for each child is already agreed. A relative has confirmed a suitable destination. Key contacts and the plan are on paper.

The emergency would still matter. You would still need current information, and conditions could force you to change plans. Preparation would not guarantee a comfortable night or a safe outcome.

But several urgent questions would already have answers. You could spend more of your attention on what is actually happening.

That difference can matter enormously when someone is cold, frightened, medically vulnerable, or waiting for you to decide.

GIVE YOURSELF A STARTING POINT

Write down the first three needs that would become urgent in your household. Include the person or animal affected. Keep that list for the readiness card on page 12.

This has happened before

1859 and 1989 When the disruption came from the Sun

The Carrington geomagnetic storm disrupted telegraph communications in 1859. In March 1989, a solar storm overwhelmed Quebec's grid and caused a nine-hour blackout. NOAA identifies power, navigation, radio, and satellite systems as vulnerable to space weather. These are documented hazards, not a forecast of another event tomorrow. [1]

2011 When one disaster became several

Japan's earthquake and tsunami on March 11 damaged infrastructure and led to the Fukushima Daiichi accident. Loss of off-site and on-site power, together with compromised safety systems, contributed to severe reactor damage. The disaster shows how different systems can fail together. It does not mean every earthquake or outage produces a nuclear emergency. [2]

2021 When winter became a power emergency

During the February freeze in Texas and the surrounding region, generating plants experienced freezing and fuel problems. FERC's final report describes extended electricity losses and deaths associated with the loss of power. The event exposed failures of winter preparation and coordination, with immediate consequences inside homes. [3]

A household cannot repair a transmission network or redesign a power station. It can decide where drinking water is kept, how vulnerable relatives will be supported, and where people will go if a home becomes unsafe.

BRING THE HISTORY HOME

Which local hazard could interrupt more than one service you depend on? Ask your local emergency-management office where to find its current hazard and alert information.

Failure does not need an enemy

January 2023 An aviation system failed

The FAA paused domestic departures during a NOTAM outage. Its preliminary review traced the problem to files unintentionally deleted during database work, with no evidence then of malicious intent. A technical mistake had national consequences. [4]

July 2024 An update caused a widespread outage

CrowdStrike reported that a content configuration update for its Windows sensor caused a widespread outage. The failure illustrates how many organizations can share exposure to the same technology. [5]

April 2025 Spain and Portugal lost power

The final ENTSO-E investigation identified interacting electrical-system problems, including voltage-control gaps and cascading generation disconnections. A regional blackout followed a sequence of failures rather than one simple, spectacular cause. [6]

November 2026 Departures stopped again

On November 13, the FAA issued a nationwide ground stop after communications problems affected multiple control centers. A November 14 update pointed to a router problem during communications upgrades; the precise fault remained under investigation when this book was checked. [7]

The practical lesson is uncomfortable: essential services can be interrupted without a declaration of war, an extraordinary warning, or a villain you can identify. A family plan is useful before the final incident report exists.

LOOK FOR THE SHARED DEPENDENCY

> **What happens if your phone must provide light, news, maps, payments, and family contact at the same time? Choose one function you can support another way.**

Why institutions prepare

In March 2025, the European Commission's Preparedness Union Strategy called for guidelines supporting at least 72 hours of population self-sufficiency. Its stated concerns include conflict, cyber threats, climate change, and natural hazards. [8]

U.S. military resilience planning also has a history. In 2017, the Army described a minimum 14-day energy and water goal for critical missions. In 2026, FORTRESS America put renewed emphasis on installation power independence, hardening, and supply-chain resilience. These are public contingency programs, not dates for a predicted civilian blackout. [9,10]

In November 2026, Moneycontrol reported that Iran's state news agency had published nuclear-survival guidance on October 29, prepared by Isfahan emergency services during Passive Defence Week. This is attributed reporting; the original Iranian release was not directly retrieved for this book. It describes preparation for a frightening possibility, not proof that a nuclear strike has been ordered. [11]

The concerns are substantial. SIPRI's 2026 assessment describes growing nuclear escalation risks. A multinational cyber advisory documents infrastructure compromises and assesses that attackers are positioning for possible disruption during conflict. WMO's November update describes continuing heat, drought, and heavy-rainfall risks. [12,13,14]

These sources do not establish one hidden, approaching catastrophe. They do establish that responsible planning must account for interrupted services and difficult conditions. Your household needs its own practical version of that work.

MAKE THE QUESTION PERSONAL

Institutions identify the functions they must keep running. What are the functions your family cannot safely lose? Start with care, water, shelter, and contact.

Your family is at the end of the supply chain

A supply chain becomes personal when the item you cannot obtain is the one your household needs that evening.

It might be familiar food a child can eat, a charged battery for a necessary device, clean water, or transport to a suitable place. A disruption does not have to affect an entire country to reach deeply into one family's life.

Money matters too. The IMF's October 2026 outlook identifies conflict, energy costs, trade tensions, and fiscal vulnerabilities, while still forecasting global growth. That is not a prediction of universal collapse. It is another reason to build affordable buffers around ordinary needs instead of assuming that the next purchase will always be easy. [15]

Look at the actual people in your care. An infant cannot postpone a feeding because a road is closed. Someone who depends on essential treatment cannot replace an individualized care plan with a generic survival checklist. A dog still needs water and a safe way to travel.

Now look at your resources. A charged power bank has a job. An empty one has a task waiting. A backpack is useful when its contents fit the person carrying it. An agreement with another household is useful when the other household has actually agreed.

Preparation begins when you replace a hopeful assumption with something you have checked. The most valuable improvement may be a conversation, an ordinary grocery item, or a printed page.

COUNT WHAT IS REALLY AVAILABLE

Choose one essential. Locate it, check it, and record how much you actually have. Do not count a purchase you intend to make or help you have not confirmed.

What waiting can cost

We will figure it out. It is an easy sentence to say while the house is warm and the phone is charging.

During an emergency, figuring it out can mean searching through unfamiliar equipment while a child needs attention. It can mean discovering that a promised destination cannot accept your pet, that a bag is too heavy, or that two adults have each assumed the other will collect a child.

These gaps can consume time and reduce your choices. Under dangerous conditions, some can become matters of life and death.

Preparing does not make you responsible for everything a disaster does. People can suffer despite careful planning, and money, disability, housing, and access can constrain what anyone can do. The useful question is which avoidable gap you can close with the resources and support available now.

A written contact costs little. Checking a destination takes a conversation. Knowing where the light is takes a decision. Working toward stored water can begin with one suitable container. Asking for help before an emergency can reveal support you did not know existed.

You do not need to spend tonight imagining the worst. You do need to stop postponing every practical answer until the worst possible moment.

SOME DECISIONS SHOULD NOT WAIT

Who will collect your child? Where can your household safely go? How will essential care continue? Answer one of these before you put this book down.

Start your first layer tonight

Write down the people and the plan

List the people and animals included. Agree who handles child pickup, essential care, pets, and transport, with a backup adult where possible. Confirm school and childcare pickup arrangements. Record a nearby meeting place and an agreed alternative destination. Follow the current instructions for the actual emergency. [16]

Count water and familiar food

CDC recommends at least one gallon of water per person per day for three days, with more for particular needs and pets. Four people therefore need a starting baseline of 12 gallons. Build gradually, and choose food you can actually prepare and eat under your planned conditions. Count the opener, safe preparation method, and dietary requirements too. [17]

Find a light and a way to receive information

Locate working battery lighting and check its batteries. Charge a compatible power bank. Identify local alert sources and a suitable battery-powered broadcast radio. Write key contacts on paper. A radio receives information; it does not send a message to your family. [16]

Make essential care a separate conversation

If anyone depends on prescriptions, powered equipment, specialized feeding, or daily assistance, arrange continuity with their appropriate care providers. Do not wait for the equipment battery to become low before asking what the backup must be.

THREE DAYS IS A STARTING WINDOW

> **It is not a promise that help arrives after 72 hours or that a disaster ends then. Build a usable first layer and extend it as your circumstances allow.**

A FEW BOUNDARIES THAT MATTER

Keep the backup from becoming the emergency

When normal services stop, an improvised fix can look better than it is. A little preparation includes knowing which shortcuts are dangerous.

Never run a portable generator inside a home, garage, basement, shed, or other enclosed space, even with doors or windows open. CPSC advises outdoor operation at least 20 feet from homes and buildings, with exhaust directed away from doors, windows, and vents. Keep working carbon-monoxide alarms and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Never use a charcoal grill indoors. [18]

Keep emergency movement tied to the actual hazard. Leaving may be necessary; in another situation, sheltering may be the instruction. Follow current local directions. Never delay an urgent evacuation to finish packing.

Use approved, compatible equipment for essential medical needs. A successful charging test on a phone does not show that a power source is suitable for someone else's treatment equipment.

Involve children through short, announced practice with adult support. Give them useful, manageable tasks. Adults remain responsible for dangerous equipment, care, travel, and protection.

There is no need to manufacture an emergency to discover whether the flashlight works. Practice the ordinary parts in ordinary conditions, then correct what you learn.

TRY ONE SAFE REHEARSAL

Ask another adult to find the household plan and a working light. Discuss the next steps without switching off essential services, withholding supplies, or separating anyone.

PRINT AND COMPLETE / KEEP PERSONAL DETAILS PRIVATE

Our first family readiness card

Complete what you can today. This is a starting summary, not a substitute for current emergency instructions or an individualized care plan.

Household and date

People and animals included

Most urgent care need and responsible adult

Child pickup or dependent-care lead and agreed backup

Meeting place and confirmed alternative destination

Safe transport and a confirmed backup

Water actually stored and next supply gap

Working light and information source location

Contact details and printed care instructions location

Next action, person responsible, and completion time

YOUR NEXT STEP WITH FORTRESSREADY

Turn concern into a plan you can use

If this book has made an unanswered question harder to ignore, give that question a useful answer.

FortressReady: Prepare for Your Family's First 72 Hours takes the next step with a 13-chapter family guide. It connects household decisions to practical supplies, affordable shopping, organization, and safe practice.

Work through water storage and treatment choices, familiar shelf-stable food, lighting and power needs, and ready bags for individual family members. Plan for shelter, clothing, hygiene, childcare, and communication when ordinary networks are unavailable.

Then connect the pieces: transportation and evacuation, temporary or longer relocation arrangements, other households, family roles, and review routines. Chapter worksheets and planners help turn reading into decisions you can keep.

Start with what you own. Identify the gaps that matter. Spend against the plan. Practice enough to discover what needs changing while you still have the time and services to change it.

The guide cannot guarantee survival, and buying a book does not prepare a household. Its value is the work it helps you complete. Use it with current official guidance and the needs of your actual family.

GET THE COMPLETE GUIDE

> **FortressReady: Prepare for Your Family's First 72 Hours. Build your household plan, complete the worksheets, and begin closing the gaps.**

You can begin the free readiness card today, whether or not you purchase the full guide.

While it is still an ordinary evening

The people you love may never know how much work sits behind an uneventful night.

They may never notice the water you rotated, the contact you printed, the spare clothing you checked, or the conversation that confirmed a place to stay. Those are quiet acts. They rarely feel urgent while you are doing them.

One day, they may matter more than almost anything you bought for an ordinary afternoon.

We want you to take that possibility seriously. We also want you to know that useful preparation can begin without a bunker, an expensive cart of equipment, or certainty about the future.

Give yourself one completed action tonight. Make the plan visible to the adults who will use it. Include the child who needs reassurance, the relative who needs support, and the animal who cannot arrange its own way out. Let other trusted people help where you need help.

Then keep going, in steps you can sustain. Revisit the plan as people grow, circumstances change, and you learn what works.

If an emergency comes, we hope you will have more than a feeling that you should have started sooner. We hope you will have a working light, a clear next step, and people who know how to help one another.

With care for your family and ours,

Marty & Sparky

DO ONE THING BEFORE YOU CLOSE THIS BOOK

Choose it. Write it down. Begin while it is still an ordinary evening.

Sources and further reading

Numbered references support factual claims. The household scenario and action prompts are original. Source organizations do not endorse FortressReady.

[1] NOAA

Space weather Storms from the Sun. Undated explainer; checked November 15, 2026. Carrington and Quebec events; technological effects of space weather.

https://www.noaa.gov/explainers/space-weather-storms-from-sun

[2] UNSCEAR

Fukushima Report Frequently Asked Questions. 2020/2021 report; current explanatory page. Earthquake, tsunami, power loss, and the nuclear accident; no claim that an outage alone causes such an accident.

https://www.unscear.org/unscear/en/areas-of-work/fukushima-report-faq.html

[3] FERC and NERC

Final Report on February 2021 Freeze Underscores Winterization Recommendations. November 16, 2021. Freezing and fuel failures, prolonged outages, and public-safety consequences.

https://ferc.gov/news-events/news/final-report-february-2021-freeze-underscores-winterization-recommendations

[4] FAA

FAA NOTAM Statement. January 11 and 19, 2023. Preliminary findings regarding unintended deletion of files and the ground stop.

https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/faa-notam-statement

[5] CrowdStrike

Channel File 291 Incident Root Cause Analysis is Available. August 6, 2024. The vendor's account of its July 19 content update and resulting widespread outage.

https://www.crowdstrike.com/en-us/blog/channel-file-291-rca-available/

Sources continued

[6] ENTSO-E

Final Report on 28 April 2025 Blackout in Spain and Portugal. March 20, 2026. Final expert-panel findings on interacting grid failures.

https://www.entsoe.eu/news/2026/03/20/entso-e-publishes-expert-panel-final-report-on-28-april-2025-blackout-in-spain-and-portugal/

[7] U.S. Department of Transportation

Update on Restoration of Airspace Following Nationwide Ground Stop. November 14, 2026. Preliminary explanation for November 13 communications problems; root cause remained under investigation.

https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/icymi-us-transportation-secretary-sean-p-duffy-provides-update-restoration-airspace

[8] European Commission

EU preparedness union strategy. March 2025. All-hazards approach and guidelines toward minimum 72-hour population self-sufficiency.

https://commission.europa.eu/topics/preparedness_en

[9] U.S. Army

Army pursuing 14-day energy water independence for installations. March 28, 2017. Historical military planning goals for essential energy and water.

https://www.army.mil/article/184993/army_pursuing_14_day_energy_water_independence_for_installations

[10] U.S. Army and Pentagon News

State of the Force address and new initiatives. October 2, 2026; speech September 30. Confirmation of FORTRESS America's installation resilience and supply-chain aims. No predicted blackout date is inferred.

https://www.army.mil/article/295897/hegseth_delivers_state_of_the_force_address_outlines_series_of_new_initiatives

Sources continued

[11] Moneycontrol World Desk

Iran issues nuclear attack survival guide amid US strike concerns. November 3, 2026. Secondary reporting attributing the October 29 guide to IRNA and Isfahan emergency services. The original release was not directly retrieved; no medical instructions are adopted from this report.

https://www.moneycontrol.com/world/avoid-windows-seek-shelter-iran-issues-nuclear-attack-survival-guide-amid-us-strike-concerns-article-14067943.html

[12] SIPRI

Increasing focus on nuclear weapons amid heightened escalation risks. June 8, 2026. Nuclear modernization and escalation-risk assessment; no numerical near-term prediction.

https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2026/increasing-focus-nuclear-weapons-amid-heightened-escalation-risks-new-sipri-yearbook-out-now

[13] Australian Signals Directorate and international partners

PRC state-sponsored actors compromise and maintain persistent access to U.S. critical infrastructure. February 8, 2024. Joint advisory documents intrusions; future disruptive intent is an attributed intelligence assessment, not a scheduled attack.

https://www.cyber.gov.au/advisory/prc-state-sponsored-actors-compromise-and-maintain-persistent-access-to-us-critical-infrastructure

[14] World Meteorological Organization

State of the Climate Update for COP31. November 9, 2026. Current heat, drought, and heavy-rainfall risks; no forecast of imminent global collapse.

https://wmo.int/resources/publication-series/state-of-climate-update-cop/state-of-climate-update-cop31

[15] International Monetary Fund

World Economic Outlook Resilience Under Strain Urgent Choices. October 13, 2026. Downside risks and a baseline that still projects growth; not financial advice or a collapse forecast.

https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2026/10/13/world-economic-outlook-october-2026

Sources continued

[16] FEMA

Local Elected and Appointed Officials Guide. 2022. Individual preparedness section covers supplies, alerts, shelter, evacuation, transport, communication, and pets.

https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_local-elected-officials-guide_2022.pdf

[17] CDC

How to Create an Emergency Water Supply. June 27, 2025. At least one gallon per person per day for three days; increase for particular needs and pets. Household arithmetic is original.

https://www.cdc.gov/water-emergency/about/how-to-create-and-store-an-emergency-water-supply.html

[18] U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

Generator carbon monoxide and fire hazards ahead of hurricane season. 2026. Outdoor generator placement and carbon-monoxide precautions. Charcoal warning also appears in the CPSC guide linked below.

https://www.cpsc.gov/Newsroom/News-Releases/2026/CPSC-Warns-of-Generator-Carbon-Monoxide-and-Fire-Hazards-Ahead-of-Hurricane-Season

[18a] U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

Generators and Engine-Driven Tools. Undated safety guide; checked November 15, 2026. Additional support for never operating generators or charcoal grills indoors.

https://www.cpsc.gov/Safety-Education/Safety-Guides/Carbon-Monoxide-Home/Generators-and-Engine-Driven-Tools