Power Distribution Devices in Your Home

In order to properly react to an electrical outage, it’s helpful to understand which devices in your home distribute power. Electrical power distribution is a system of electricity transmission and regulation. Energy enters your home’s wiring system through a main electrical line and is transmitted through the various circuits in your home. Circuit breakers are among the most important energy-distribution components found in modern homes. They’re designed to protect your wiring from power surges and overheating by switching off in the event of an electrical surge.

What to Do During a Power Outage

- Find out whether the power outage is only within your home or if it's affecting others in your community so you can make the most effective plan of action.
- One of the first things you should do during a power outage is unplug any appliances or electronics to avoid power surge damage once the power is restored. Sensitive devices should be on surge protectors to prevent damage if you can't unplug them in time.
- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as long as possible so your food stays cold.
- During winter storm power outages, dress in layers to stay warm.
- Use battery-powered lights such as flashlights instead of candles, which pose a fire hazard.
- Leave one light plugged in with the switch on so that you can tell when the power is restored.

Tip
A power outage is the perfect opportunity to use a standby generator or a portable generator.

Caution
Don't run a generator indoors. For more information, read How to Use a Portable Generator.

What to Do Once the Power Is Restored

- When the power comes back on, wait a few minutes before plugging everything back in as you could encounter power surges. Turn on essential appliances first and then gradually turn on other electronics.
- Reset digital clocks, timers, alarms, network routers and other essential items.

- If you operated your garage door opener manually using the emergency release cord, you'll need to reconnect the door to the opener. See the manufacturer's instructions for details.
- If your HVAC won't turn on after a storm, you may need to restart it. Some units require you to turn off the thermostat, reset the circuit breaker and wait a period of time before restarting the system. Other models may require some other combination of steps or may feature a reset button. If you have any doubts or if the circuit breaker shuts off again after resetting it, call a professional. For breaker box tips, see our video What's in My Breaker Box?