How to Stay Connected in a Power Outage

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Here are some tips for communicating with emergency services and loved ones as a snowstorm bears down on the Northeast:

__ Keep your phones plugged in so that they're fully charged if the power goes out. There are various products available that can recharge a cellphone from a larger rechargeable battery or AA batteries.

__ Even if your cellphone is charged when the power goes out, the wireless network may not work. Some cell towers are equipped with backup batteries and some have generators, but not all.

__ If your power goes out, you could use your car to recharge your phones. Of course, don't run the car in an enclosed space, or you risk carbon monoxide poisoning.

__ Ideally, you should have a corded landline phone as well. They get all the power they need from the line itself. Cordless phones stop working when the power goes out.

__ Home phones hooked up to cable or Verizon FiOS aren't powered by those lines, but the modems in the home usually have backup batteries that will last about eight hours. That means corded phones hooked up to these services will work without your home's electric power. Again, cordless phones will be useless.

__ Working cell towers may be overloaded by people calling to check in on each other or surfing the Web. Cellphone companies recommend text messaging rather than calling in any disaster, because text messages use much less network capacity. They also don't use much battery power. Using Facebook and Twitter can be tempting, but try to keep usage brief and use the phone's apps rather than web browsers if possible, to minimize network use and battery drain.

__ But if you lose power at home, your house's Internet service won't work. Wireless Internet service on your phones is your best bet.

__ If you have a battery-powered radio or car radio, use it to get your news updates rather than taxing the wireless network and your phone battery.

__ Vehicle emergency systems like General Motors Co.'s OnStar rely on a wireless network (OnStar uses Verizon's), so they're susceptible to network outages, just like cellphones. However, OnStar says customers report better luck connecting with their car systems than with cellphones, probably because the car has a much larger antenna, allowing it to reach more distant towers.

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