

Winter weather - ice storms - power failures: plan ahead



Severe winter weather, arctic freeze and ice storms can cause power failures as far south as Texas and Florida. Extended power failures can result in freezing fire sprinkler and domestic water piping and significant water damage to property. Taking steps to prepare, protect and recover from the impact of severe winter weather and power failures can help minimize the potential adverse effects and damage. Steps include:

Preparation

- Check heating systems ahead for proper operation and service as needed.
- Have a plan to know how to respond to a lengthy power failure and loss of heat.
- Have equipment ready for keeping drains clear and removing excessive snow loads from the roof.
- Line up appropriate licensed sprinkler contractors, plumbing contractors and electricians, in the event of need.

Protection

When a power failure disrupts the delivery of heat for several hours to several days and the temperature in the building falls below 32° F:

- Shut off and completely drain all fire sprinkler systems.
- Notify the local fire department and alarm company that you have shut off your fire sprinkler system(s).
- Drain fire sprinklers installed on suspended ceiling areas especially over valuable items and equipment.
- Turn off automatic diesel fire pumps and start manually to conserve fuel.
- Shut down hazardous operations, such as welding and torch cutting, while sprinklers are off.
- Provide a constant fire watch of trained personnel for all areas while the sprinklers are off.
- Shut off and completely drain the domestic water and heating piping systems.
- Operate portable heating systems in accordance with safe use and manufacturer instructions.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions in operating emergency generators, installed by licensed electricians.
- Clear all roof drains, gutters and scuppers.

- Clear snow and ice from roof (if done safely) if there is a roof/building collapse potential.

Recovery

After the event is over and the power restored:

- Inspect and repair all fire sprinkler, domestic water and heating system piping before restoring them to service.
- Keep around the clock surveillance even after restoring for additional damage as piping begins to thaw.
- Do not use open flames, lamps or other high temperature devices to thaw frozen pipes.
- Restore all fire sprinkler, domestic water and heating system piping to service.
- Notify the fire department and the alarm company that the systems are back in service.
- Maintain the weather watch. Watch for rainstorms which can cause pooling and collapse.
- Take measures to ensure all roof drainage is in service.
- Watch for post storm drifting on roofs and remove the extra weight, if this can be done safely.
- Clear fire lanes, fire hydrants, fire sprinkler valves, process valves, gas shutoffs, etc of snow accumulations.
- Resume normal safe operations.