

# Lights Out

Recent storm and power outage deliver sobering message



By Cecily Hastings  
Publisher's Desk

**W**hen January's big storm hit, we were among the thousands in Sacramento who lost electrical power. Most people had their power restored within a few hours. Our electrical outage lasted three days. At this writing, a week after the storm, I know some who still don't have power.

It's amazing to realize just how this invisible lifeline keeps us connected to the world—and how spoiled we are to be able to operate nearly every minute of every day with reliable and relatively inexpensive electricity.

Our first thoughts were of our neighbor, whose ailing wife is

constantly on oxygen. We were relieved to discover that he and his son set up a generator and were able to get their heat and television back on.

Not that my husband hadn't tried to warn me when the storm warning came out nearly a week earlier. I'll admit I thought it was much ado about nothing. Thankfully, he convinced me to secure things in our yard that could blow over. But despite all the warnings about possible power loss, I had no idea exactly how to prepare. We already had flashlights and plenty of batteries.

The reality is that a power loss means your house will be cold, dark and with not much to do. My husband stayed busy by purchasing a small generator and trying to hook it up to the sump pump that protects our basement. When the pump switch shorted, he instead hooked it up to the freezer in the basement that holds dozens of pounds of frozen fish from a fishing trip last summer to Alaska. With extension cords, we were able to power up a few lights and even the

television in the basement for an hour or so.

But the down side of a generator is that it is very loud. Imagine the sound of a powerful leaf blower or lawn mower. I wasn't about to complain, but I didn't want to overuse it, knowing that our neighbors wouldn't appreciate the noise in an otherwise very quiet landscape. The first thing you notice during a power outage is how eerily quiet it gets almost instantly. So we kept it on for a few hours at a time, then shut it off.

An amazingly clever friend of my husband's came over and hooked up the generator to power our refrigerator, a light in the kitchen and the gas boiler that heats our water and under-floor heating system. It kept the food in the refrigerator and freezer from spoiling, but our heating system takes about eight hours to warm the house, so that never happened.

For lights, we used flashlights and candles, and we made a trip to REI to purchase battery-powered headlamps for reading while snuggled

in bed. Our battery-powered radio kept us up with the news. And with darkness setting in by about 6 p.m., we certainly caught up on our sleep!

Our 17-year-old son was helpful and mostly cheerful, even going to a movie one night by himself just to relieve the boredom. We felt bad for those with little children or the elderly who wouldn't fare as well with the cold and disruption to their routines. The most frustrating part was not knowing how long it will last. We didn't want to take drastic steps because the power could come back on at any moment.

Overall, losing power was disruptive, but we know that many others had it much, much worse, and for that we feel blessed. A friend had a tree fall on her home, a nearby home in Midtown was severed in half, others had damage to their cars and a whole town in Nevada was flooded.

Our storm experience was brought into focus because I recently read an excellent article by *Comstock*

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# INSIDE

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Magazine publisher Winnie Comstock about the Safely Out project.

With levee repairs still under way throughout the region, Sacramento is the U.S. city at the highest risk for a major flood. More than 150,000 vulnerable residents live in neighborhoods that could be inundated by more than two feet of water during a severe flood, according to *Sacramento Bee* research.

We all need to prepare for the possibility of a flood evacuation. Most importantly, Comstock reminded us that we need to ensure that the most vulnerable among us are protected.

Safely Out is the brainchild of the nonprofit Citizen Voice, founded by Gary and Elyse Dietrich, longtime Sacramento media professionals.

Their goal is to involve citizens in nonpartisan activities that benefit their communities. They are especially interested in helping those who are most at risk.

Safely Out is a local pilot project to safely evacuate the vulnerable during both natural and man-made disasters. It is a neighbor-helping-neighbor effort, assisting vulnerable populations in reaching safety and relieving the burden first responders and caregivers often shoulder alone.

The Safely Out kit consists of a brightly colored door sign that tells others if help is needed, a refrigerator magnet with essential contact information, storage bags for medications and insurance information and more. The cost of the kit is \$10.

More than 10,000 Safely Out kits have already been distributed in the greater Sacramento region, and 15,000 more were to have

been distributed by late January. Ultimately, \$1 million will be needed to complete the initial phase of the Sacramento region pilot project with the successful distribution of 100,000 kits.

“This is only the beginning of what is rapidly becoming a major neighbor-helping-neighbor effort that is capturing national attention,” said Heather Atherton of Citizen Voice.

I urge our readers to join me in supporting Safely Out. Inside Publications has joined forces with Citizen Voice to sponsor and distribute Safely Out kits to residents in our circulation areas.

But we need our readers to distribute them to neighbors who may be vulnerable in an emergency. Please e-mail us and we’ll arrange for you to pick them up at a convenient location. If you would like to donate money toward the cost of the project, please visit [citizenvoice.org](http://citizenvoice.org) or call 503-3194.

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