

## What About The Next Big Freeze?

Feb 25, 2024 - 2-4pm Grange Mtg

Notes by Michelle Gregory

Malinda Carlson and Robert Grott facilitated a discussion prompted from a Facebook post by a local Corbett resident. "So now that we are thawing out, let's have some fun. What are you wanting to do to prepare for the next big freeze?" One hundred and twenty comments flew in within a few days. Many of the comments pertained to items people wanted to have on hand before another debilitating storm. Eleven area residents attended the discussion.

### **What was the most valuable resource for you during the storm? What saved your bacon?**

Wood stove – need to have an ample supply of dry seasoned wood was key and the stoves had to be tended through the night. Stove top fans and ceiling fans (when you have generator power), help move the heated air.

Generators – needed to have an ample supply of fuel (fuel stabilizers are essential for storing gas). Some experienced finicky or failing generators, frozen regulators, tubes and lines going brittle, crystals in fuel lines, bad spark plugs, or the wind causing CO2 alarms to turn off the generator. Suggestions included: test your unit during the off season, maintain equipment, track usage (so you know how much fuel you're using per hour), turn generator off at night as needs are reduced, place an upside down flower pot on top of the generator regulator to protect it from icing up.

Electric cars – were helpful as a battery backup if they were charged when the power failed. One person indicated that charging their phone only used one percent of the battery charge.

Cars – Many used their cars to warm up or charge phones. Gas up your vehicles prior to storm.

Heat – Some had internal temps drop as low as 30 degrees and condensation build up from single pane windows and poorly insulated spaces. This resulted in freezing pipes even though the faucet was running. Containing heat in a smaller section of the home was accomplished by draping blankets over windows and doors, using insulating tape, gaffer tape, Styrofoam, pillows and cushions in drafty zones. Some people had no heat source (fireplace/wood stove/pellet stove). Propane and Kerosene heaters have improved and some are rated for indoor use.

Hiking crampons - with ½" micro spikes were required to walk on hard ice or sloping areas (yak traks range from \$20 - \$70). Good snow pants, high grip boots, insulated coveralls, hard hats or bike helmets for flying ice were helpful..

Battery backups - chargers, portable chargers, cordless drill batteries (you can buy lanterns to fit), and portable power stations need to be charged prior to loss of electricity. These batteries can assist for use of medical equipment, keeping fiber controls and modems powered, and running charging stations. Starlink phones were discussed, however the price is likely beyond most people's capabilities.

Neighbors – Many people reached out to neighbors to provide or ask for assistance. Corbett Area FaceBook was a primary resource.

Tools – battery powered gas siphon like the Horusdy portable power battery pump is available for \$17 on Amazon. Ice chopper – like the Bigfoot ice chopper or the Walnsee Flat Shovel is made for chopping thick ice on sidewalks or driveways.

Clothing: silk, wool, overalls, coveralls, Carhartt's and dry layers were helpful.

Food – having a stock pile of soup and chili ingredients, items to cook on the camp stove/wood stove, bread, peanut butter, ground coffee, eggs, cheese, snacks, tuna – remember that recommendations are to have 2 weeks worth of water and food for any disaster event.

### **Challenges: what was a real struggle?**

Dogs and livestock couldn't walk on ice. Try locking up livestock if possible. Use kitty litter or sand on the ground for dogs to walk on.

Fridge and freezers failing – Fill jugs with water and place them outside to form ice packs. They can be placed in fridge/freezer. Try putting food into coolers and leaving them outside. To monitor if your freezer is maintaining its ability to keep your food frozen try this: Keep a paper cup of water in the freezer. Place a coin onto the surface of the frozen water. If your freezer is not maintaining a freezing temp the water in the container will thaw a little and the coin will gradually sink downwards.

Hot Water heaters – It is recommended that, if the water supply goes out, the power to the hot water heater should be shut off at the electrical panel so that a drained tank doesn't keep heating. For extra caution, also close the water valve supplying the heater to prevent draining. Be sure the heater is filled before restoring power. If water was cut off to your home, as well as power, turning off the water heater could prevent it from burning out once the power came back on.

Power Strips with surge protectors can save appliances and heat pumps.

Generators: rather than simply running extension cords to single loads, a better option is to install a Transfer Switch that routes the generator to selected circuits. A simpler and much cheaper option is to install a Mechanical Interlock device on the electrical panel, and then manage the loads as desired. These options require professional installation – the outside panel can be set up to selectively circuit. Some panels need to be upgraded to accommodate them but this eliminates the need for chords strung through the house.

Pellet stoves/oil furnaces/propane fireplaces – all need electricity. It is a fairly simple process to rewire the furnace so that it has a plug that can go either to house power, or when needed, into an extension cord running to an OUTSIDE generator. Simple rewiring directly to a generator can work – all should be done by a professional. Note that large propane tanks have exhaust valves for pressure changes inside the tanks. Smaller portable tanks do not.

Fuel storage safety – safest for fuel to be stored a good distance from the house.

Propane source - Should you buy or rent a tank and should it be buried or not? Our local Firewise resource does report buried propane tanks are safer during fires (following standards of course).

Cooking -Several shared that their Coleman camping stove was used for cooking, along with burners from propane kitchen cooktops, and wood/propane stoves with flat tops.

Pipes – helps to have insulators, rigid styro for basement windows, covers for spigots, thru the wall spigots, leave faucets running inside and keep cabinet doors open to expose sink pipes. If it gets below freezing inside your pipes will likely freeze.

Outdoor- Freeze-proof faucets (also called hydrants) tie into buried water lines and, when shut off, drain through a valve below the frost line. These need to be tested for proper draining before each winter (check manufactures instructions).

Livestock – needed water and constant tending. Perhaps the fire district or some other entity could develop a list of livestock owners (perhaps one still exists from the Eagle Creek fire) to offer support.

Warming shelter at Fire Station – came together quickly. Run by volunteers and at times staffing was slim. In future could use additional charging stations and a water fill station (as opposed to bottles). Using the tender was a life saver. The water district did have a spigot for filling large vessels for animals.

Neighbors - Checking on each other to insure safety, share resources and have a social outlet. Facebook was helpful for its immediacy and broad-based forum.

Medications – Make sure your meds are filled and on hand. Talk to your provider if your meds are filled on a schedule and may not arrive in time. We had over a week of no mail or package delivery. Often time providers can fill a script if you live remotely. This is especially important for life saving meds (insulin, epilepsy drugs, oxygen, etc.)

To go kit – If traveling away from home, consider taking meds, a flashlight, change of clothes, water, shovel.

Some communities use color coded cards for their front window or end of their driveway (green = we are okay, yellow = we may need help, red = we need help!)

Phone alerts – often go to owners and not renters.

General communications – with many different providers and differing reception (texting, emailing, social media) it adds layers of complexity and barriers to contacting all concerned.

Phone and internet – Reliance has buried fiber cables that were not interrupted (if you had power or battery backup). Xfinity was out for up to 9 days due to lines being down.

Gas and groceries – No gas available in Corbett, local markets had limited hours if any at all, Helping Hands was shut down for one shopping day.

Potential action items:

1. Have a “Generator Care & Feeding” workshop
2. Organize block parties during better weather so people can meet socially during a non-crisis time and prep proactively. Perhaps do this during the National Night Out (Tuesday August 6, 2024).
3. Have a better explanation for what to do with water heaters in the event of losing water, losing electricity, or both.
4. Are there grants for disaster preparedness in rural or remote areas?
5. At what point would lack of food coming into town result in hardship?

Robert and Malinda thanked everyone for coming and sharing their experiences and ideas.

*These notes were compiled by Michelle Gregory, for the Grange executive committee and for distillation into a report to the State Grange about how we coped with this challenge together. The group granted permission for their meeting content and their images to be used for this purpose.*