



## City of Bartow Electric Department Hurricane Information

### Frequently Asked Questions

Here are some questions commonly asked by media and customers when a hurricane is threatening our service area.

#### 1. What is Bartow doing to prepare for this Hurricane?

Bartow staff members meet regularly to assess the situation and update our strategies and plans. Bartow has a comprehensive, detailed plan for responding to a hurricane that assigns responsibilities to each Bartow employee. Of course, repair personnel will be making repairs to the system. However, many office workers will be out in the field supporting those repair crews. They also may serve as guides to out-of-town repair crews, using chain saws to remove debris from Bartow facilities, or serving meals to restoration crews.

When a hurricane threatens Bartow, we begin notifying those utilities and companies with which we have mutual aid agreements and contracts so they will be ready should we need them. Bartow has agreements and contracts with other electric utilities, food vending companies, fuel suppliers, tree-cutting services and other vendors to assist and support the restoration effort.

#### 2. What should residents be doing to prepare?

The standard recommendations are always prudent:

- get enough bottled water for several days (rule of thumb is one gallon per person per day)
- make sure you have a battery-powered radio and flash lights and plenty of batteries (NOT candles)
- board up windows (masking tape is not recommended)
- secure lawn furniture, etc.

Here are a few ideas you may not have thought of:

- Capture water in your water heater by turning off power to the unit, and then close the water valves. This way if you lose water pressure, you will have about 40 gallons of fresh water stored in the tank.
- Store additional water in your bathtub, and fill the washing machine with water, too. This water supply can be used later for cleaning or to operate your toilet.
- Make sure you have a can opener that doesn't need electricity.
- Get some Fix-a-Flat tire sealant to quickly repair and inflate tires damaged by debris after the storm.
- Make sure you have a regular, corded phone. Cordless phones will not work when the power is off. Fully charge cell phones.

#### 3. What should people who rely on electricity for medical equipment be doing?

Those who rely on electricity to operate necessary medical equipment should make arrangements now to ensure their safety in the event of a loss of power. People with "special needs" should contact the local Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Bartow (863) 534-0321.

#### 4. What advice do you have for people who are thinking of buying a generator?

Bartow recommends you do not use a generator unless you know how to use one safely. In the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew, some homeowners connected generators to the wiring inside their homes. Electricity from a generator flowed backward through the transformer causing the voltage to increase to thousands of volts and electrocuted unsuspecting line-repair personnel. With that important note made, we would suggest people think about what they hope to gain with a generator. For example, if you think the power will be out for one day, is that enough to justify purchasing a generator that costs several hundred dollars? If you expect power will be out for weeks, how will you obtain fuel to keep the generator running? Transporting and storing large volumes of fuel can be dangerous. If you do purchase a generator, use it outside your home in a well-ventilated area. Fumes from a running generator can be deadly. Whatever you do, think about the purchase and have a good plan that includes safety.

#### 5. Should people who evacuate do anything special to help minimize damage to the electric and plumbing systems in their homes?

If you plan to evacuate, turn off the circuit breakers for the water heater. Also, consider turning off power to your home at the main electrical panel, and turning off water at the home's main service valve.

#### 6. During the storm, does Bartow plan to keep the power and water on or will you turn the power, water and sewer plants off at some point for safety?

Bartow will not choose to turn off electric or water service to any customers. As weather conditions worsen, it is very likely that some customers will lose power. As long as safety permits, we will continue trying to keep power on for all customers by making repairs to the system as needed. However, once winds exceed 45 mph, it is no longer safe to use equipment like bucket trucks. At that point, Bartow will order crews to shelter until the brunt of the storm passes. Crews will return to work as soon as they can safely do so. Bartow's water and sewer plants have back-up generators to help keep those services operating throughout a storm. However, severe system damage could occur causing service disruptions. Crews will make those repairs as quickly as possible.

#### 7. What does Bartow do immediately after a hurricane passes?

Bartow field engineers, about 10 teams of two, begin a field assessment of the damage. This effort could take several days, depending on the level of damage the system sustains. Customers should keep in mind that stopping the engineers to ask questions will slow down this assessment and can also slow down the overall restoration effort. After the assessment is complete, Bartow will have a better idea of how long it will take to restore service to customers. Also during this time, Bartow will be communicating updates through local media outlets about outages, where crews are working and the progress being made.

If your power is on, [Bartow encourages you to keep your front porch/flood light on – day and night](#) – which will help our assessment teams further focus their attention on homes and facilities where power needs to be restored.

#### 8. What about damage on my property?

When the storm has safely cleared, we encourage you to assess your own damage, too. Once Bartow crews have cleared away any electric lines, the homeowner is responsible for tree removal on the homeowner's property. Bartow will clear from the lines only that section of a tree or limb that prevents a crew from repairing the Bartow wires. All clean up from a broken or fallen tree and/or limb is the responsibility of the property owner. Bartow will not remove limbs or trees from wires that are NOT Bartow's, which includes Phone and Cable TV wires. Bartow will NOT remove any limb or any part of a tree that is on a structure or building.

Likewise, any damage to the weatherhead (the device where the electric line attaches to the home) must be repaired by a licensed electrician before Bartow can safely reconnect your power.

#### 9. What about trees that block my driveway or the roadway.

The City of Bartow's Department of Public Works is responsible for removing trees, limbs and other debris from the roadways. To report this, contact City Hall at 534-0100.

**10. How do you decide who gets power first?**

Our restoration plan focuses on returning power to the facilities that deliver power to the largest number of affected customers first. First, we repair damage to the Bartow substations that distribute power and the lines that connect our substations. Then, we focus on restoring power to the customers who provide essential services to your community, such as hospitals, police, and fire stations. Next, we repair damage that will return power to the greatest number of customers in the least amount of time. Once major repairs have been made, we begin working to restore individuals and small groups of customers. But with the widespread damage and sheer volume of affected facilities, it takes essentially the same level of effort to fix the facility that provides power to thousands as it does to one that delivers power to only a few. So even though we have restored power to a very large percentage of those affected, it will take more time to get to those smaller groups of homes or businesses scattered throughout our service area. We then begin the very time-consuming process of going street by street and house by house to make the final repairs that will get everyone’s power back on.

**11. Does Bartow restore power to one side of town before another?**

No. Bartow generally restores power in the sequence that will result in returning service to the greatest number of customers as soon as possible. The only customers that receive any special consideration are hospitals, public safety and other life support or life-sustaining institutions. Typically, these large customers are served by very large electric lines, which are the first lines to be repaired anyway.

**12. If people lose power or water service, what should they do?**

Each situation is unique. Stay tuned to your radio for instructions about whether or when to call. If the damage to the electric system is extensive, there may be no need for you to call in the first few days. If you have lost water service, but not power, turn off the circuit breaker for the water heater to prevent damage to the heating elements from overheating.

**13. If there is widespread destruction of the electric system, how will Bartow re-build the system quickly?**

In the case of a major outage, it will days and may be even weeks before all power is restored. However, Bartow has mutual aid agreements in place with other electric utilities around the southeast. Bartow also has contacts with several private companies that perform utility construction and tree clearing. These extra crews would provide assistance to help restore power as quickly and safely as possible. Bartow has arranged for several staging areas around town where supplies and equipment can be prepared and distributed to work crews in our area.

**14. During or after a hurricane, should I call Bartow at 534-0142 to tell the utility I don’t have power?**

Not immediately. Bartow will know the major circuits are out and begin repairing them first. Once the circuits are restored, Bartow will ask you – through the local media – to begin calling in with your individual outage information.

**15. If a Boil Water notice is issued, but power is out, how do people make sure their water is safe?**

If you cannot boil water, use bleach to purify water for drinking. Use regular chlorine bleach without added fragrances. Follow the purification directions on the label. If none are given, use two drops of bleach per quart of water, or 8 drops per gallon of water. Let the water stand for 30 minutes. Also, Clorox says you can make a good sanitizing solution to wash and disinfect dishes, countertops, etc. by mixing one teaspoon of bleach in one gallon of water. Continue to use bottled or disinfected water for drinking and cooking until Bartow’s water supply has been declared safe. Listen to local news sources for regular updates.

**16. What does Bartow tell people about downed electric lines?**

Please call 911 immediately to report a downed electric line. **STAY AWAY** from all downed power lines because they may be energized. If you get close enough to an energized power line you can be electrocuted – even without actually touching the wire.

**17. Is food left in refrigerators safe to eat after the power has been out?**

According to the Red Cross, food can stay fresh in the refrigerator for up to two days without electricity, and even longer in the freezer. However, they also recommend using the food in the refrigerator first as the frozen food will be safe longer. Freezing and storing water in clean containers to leave in the refrigerator before the storm hits can also help your food stay cool. It’s best to have plenty of non-perishable food on hand to get you through post-hurricane recovery. Of course, don’t open the refrigerator/freezer door any more than necessary.

**18. For people whose homes were flooded, is there anything they should do before turning their power back on at their breaker box?**

Yes. Consult a private electrician to determine if it is safe to restore power to your home. If rising water approached your home, but just missed coming inside, you may need to have an air conditioning contractor check your heating and cooling system. The outdoor unit of the air conditioner typically sits on the ground, lower than the home, so rising water may have gotten into the electrical connections and wiring of the compressor unit control panel.

**19. People have called local news stations complaining that their neighbor (next door? next street?) got power back on before they did. Why is that happening? Why am I the only one in my neighborhood without lights?**

It could be that you and your neighbor do not share the same power line (more specifically, the same circuit). The power line feeding electricity to your home may be damaged, while the one to your neighbor’s house is not. It also could be that your individual connection requires repair. It may also be possible that your home needs internal electrical repairs before you can receive service. Again, Bartow will work to restore power to the largest number of customers first, moving to individual locations once power has been restored to major concentrations of customers.

**20. If Bartow experiences tremendous damage, will Bartow go underground with the replacement electric system?**

No. Bartow will generally restore the system to the existing design. Most lines will remain overhead. The objective in any restoration effort is to restore power as quickly and safely as possible. Installing underground utilities is a time-consuming job that would greatly delay power restoration to many customers. When Bartow does convert service from overhead to underground, the overhead system stays in place until all construction on the underground system is complete. Only then is the service switched over so that the power outage is very brief.

**21. During the restoration effort, will Bartow be assessing late fees to customers who don’t pay on time?**

No. If Bartow is hit by a hurricane requiring multiple days of restoration efforts, Bartow will suspend late fees until business returns to normal.

**22. Will Bartow reimburse customers for the cost of food lost to spoilage?**

No. Hurricanes are considered an act of nature and therefore Bartow is not responsible for spoilage. Bartow encourages customers to buy canned goods, not perishable items, and keep food stored in freezers to a minimum during hurricane season.

**23. What if I or someone in my home relies on medical equipment powered by electricity? Will Bartow restore my power first?**

No. Bartow will focus first on public health and safety facilities (hospitals, police/fire stations, schools, etc.) then begin restoring power to major circuits before responding to individual outages. Customers facing this type of situation need to contact the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in their county for assistance. The Bartow EOC citizens information number is (863) 401-2234.

**24. If I see a sewer overflow, what should I do?**

Certainly, stay away from the waste and contact Bartow City Hall at (863) 534-0100 to report it. Bartow has portable, gas-powered generators that it uses to keep pump stations working in the event of a major power outage and prevent Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs).

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Contact: City of Bartow