

December 21, 2012

A message from Police Chief Peter McGowan:

At a recent Board of Selectmen's meeting, the Board of Health raised concerns over the possibility of FIOS or other internet based telephone systems becoming inoperable due to power outages for an extended period of time. The following is an excerpt of an article from Consumer Reports Magazine, (Jan, 2012) that has several helpful suggestions. Please pay particular attention to the paragraph about Verizon's battery backup system that is highlighted below.

How to stay in touch

There is a lot you can do to make sure you're able to contact 911, friends, loved ones, and others during a power outage. You'll find additional advice on the [FCC's blog](#). Among the steps to take:

Know your system. Find out which kind of landline phone service you have and how it functions during a power outage, if at all. If you're not on copper and your company doesn't provide a battery backup for free, try to negotiate one as a condition of retaining or accepting service. If you're unsuccessful and still want the service, opt for the back-up system.

Keep extra batteries on hand. They can extend the amount of time the backup system powers your phones. Buy them from your provider, a battery supplier, or try to get additional batteries from your provider for free. (We found batteries for Verizon FiOS ranging from about \$17 to \$46 each.) To charge the batteries, rotate them in and out of the modem or backup unit. Or buy a separate charger. In a pinch, you may also be able to power the phone system for a brief time using an uninterruptible power supply (UPS). Check with your carrier for more information.

Test the backup. Some carriers monitor their customers' backup systems and presumably will alert customers if it isn't working. That can happen, for example, if the battery fails. The system also may activate a light or beeping signal to indicate the backup isn't working. Test the backup system every month or so by plugging in a corded phone, unplugging the modem or network interface power plug, and checking for a dial tone. If there isn't one, check the system or contact your provider.

Understand the backup system. Find out how the battery backup works and how long it will provide service before your phone line goes dead. Some systems may have unique capabilities. **For instance, Verizon's battery backup unit turns off when there's about an hour of power remaining. To obtain the last hour, for instance when you need to make an emergency call, press a button on the unit. You'll have just one more hour of service.**

Disconnect the battery backup. During an outage, if you don't need to use the phone immediately, disconnect the battery after the power goes out. That can prevent it from draining while the system is in standby, though you also won't be able to receive calls. When you need to make a call, plug it back in. Once power is restored, be sure to plug the battery back in so it can recharge.

Keep a corded phone. No matter what kind of landline service you have, keep a corded telephone ready to go. Most cordless phones will not work if the power is out, even if the phone line is active. [Corded phones are available](#) for about \$10. Make sure the phone you're buying doesn't need to be plugged into an electrical outlet.

Get a cell phone. Even copper phone lines can fail. A cell phone can help ensure you'll retain phone service. [Choose a service](#) that lets you pick up a signal from your home. Consider keeping extra cell phone batteries and try to have some way to recharge the phone when the power goes out, such as a car charger. Make sure your cell batteries are completely charged when you know a possible power-disrupting event is on the way.

Subscribe to copper phone service. Consider keeping (or returning to) copper service, if it's available. If you're bundling phone, TV, and Internet service, or plan to, find out if copper service will add to the cost and whether there's a service fee for returning to copper. Also ask whether having a copper line will eliminate any features that work with a bundled telecommunications package. If you're switching to fiber-based service with a telephone company and want the option of returning to copper later on, ask whether the company can keep your copper line in place (Sometimes companies remove the line to your home, making it difficult or impossible to restore copper service).

Consider a generator. If you have a [backup generator](#) that provides power to only some appliances, make sure one of them is your VoIP or fiber phone system. Run an extension cord from the generator to your modem or network interface. A whole-house generator is even better than a portable one but considerably more expensive.