

Preparing for Winter Power Cuts 2023

This resource was created as a result of a SHARE Museums East Coffee Morning led by Deborah Walton, UCM Regional Conservation Officer (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough). With thanks also to coffee morning participants for their input and ideas.

Please note: Level of response will be dependent upon the length of power cut and may differ for planned and unplanned power cuts. Planned power cuts are likely to last up to 3 hours and occur either in the morning or early evening.

For each prompt below, consider your response for planned and unplanned, and short (hours) or long (days) power cuts. Revisit your Covid lockdown procedures and Emergency Plan – you have probably explored many of these questions already.

Order of priorities:

1. Evacuation of public
2. Closure to public
3. Security

1. Evacuation - unplanned power cuts in the dark

Stay still! Stop and think.

- How do you evacuate visitors? Emergency lighting should still work – this is a legal requirement and should be checked regularly. Follow your normal evacuation procedures as if for fire but don't sound the alarm.
- Lifts – what is the default position for power failure? Is there a manual override?
- Do you need to send volunteers and/or staff home?
- What is the procedure for checking the building is empty?
- Do you use radios to communicate? Will they still function? If you have radios, make sure they are fully charged / have batteries.
- What do you do if mobile phones are not fully charged or mobile networks are down? Make sure staff and volunteers know what to do if usual communication channels are unavailable.
- Identify an assembly point for staff and volunteers to check in.
- If you have vulnerable visitors or volunteers and their normal method of travel (such as bus/train) has been cancelled, what will you do?

2. Closure

- **Communications** - reliance on electricity / internet to communicate could potentially lead to lack of information. How will you tell people you are closed? This applies to both visitors and staff. Make sure visitors are informed of pre-planned closures – website, social media, local signage.
 - Have hard copy, pre-printed closure signs ready in advance for public

- If it is possible to access the museum website, have a statement ready to publish.
- What data do you always need to be able to access? Make hard copies and ensure they are secure. Include contact information for services (insurance, alarms etc) and staff and volunteer teams – this information should all be within your Emergency Plan.
- If site is closed over the winter anyway, think about additional checks before and after power cuts – will you have to create rota to manage this?

3. Security

- If you have electric doors or gates, what position do they default to with no electricity? Make sure staff and volunteers on-site know how to operate manual overrides. Do you know how to get back in the building if electronic entry system is down?
- Check with alarm company in advance about how the alarm system works in event of a power cut.
- For a long power cut, lasting more than a day, you may have to return to do site checks (Covid lockdown procedures should cover most things to consider).

Collections:

Environmental Monitoring

- If dataloggers (base units) are reliant on electricity - speak to supplier/manufacturer in advance and, if possible, do physical download of data before power cut occurs. For planned power cuts, switch equipment off in advance to avoid any damage caused by sudden failure.
- For planned power cuts gradually reduce the amount of environmental control in the day(s) leading up to the planned black-out to create a slow and gradual change to the period with no control, and just as importantly, gradually reintroduce the environmental control. Resist the temptation to get conditions back to where they were as quickly as possible. Slow and smooth changes are much less likely to create problems.
- Understand how much data your system will store and how long for. If necessary for a planned power cut, you could reduce the scheduled logging frequency to allow for more time.
- If you have remote access from another site, this may still be working.

Loans

- Do you have to inform your lenders re power cuts? What is set out in the loan agreement? It may depend on the length and impact of the power cut.

Heating/Air cooling systems

- Weather dependent - impact on museum will come 24-48 hours later as building provides some buffering.
- If it is very cold there may be vulnerable pipework – consider preventive maintenance such as lagging.
- Find out if the heating system will automatically restart or requires manual input.
- Wherever possible, ensure all objects are not left on an open desk but are relocated to boxes or their assigned storage or display locations – this will give more protection from environmental changes.

- Close cupboards, drawers, roller racks, boxes etc to provide as much buffering as possible.
- Close doors to slow temperature and humidity change (provided it is safe to do so).
- Make sure all windows are closed and use blinds, curtains and/or shutters to reduce draughts.

Other areas to consider:

Business continuity

- Power cut lasting 2+ days will have impact on business continuity and will need to involve Trustees, insurance company, other stakeholders.

Staff/volunteers and welfare

- Can staff or volunteers access the site safely?
- Do you have contact list to check in on everyone and make sure they are ok in their own personal circumstances?
- Think about closing early for pre-planned power outages so staff/volunteers can adjust working patterns to travel safely.
- Remember that power cuts may be localised so some staff/volunteers/visitors may have power while the museum does not – and therefore may not be aware there is a problem on site.

What do you turn off/leave on at the site?

- Think about potential power surge when power is turned back on
 - Unplug as much as possible
 - For critical systems use surge protectors
- Make sure no cash is kept on the premises
- Remove food and perishable items from kitchen/staff areas
 - Empty bins!
- Turn off water

Action points:

- Check if electronic doors, gates and lifts have manual override – do you know how to operate them manually?
- Do you have torches (and batteries) to help with emergency lighting or dark areas (eg stores)? Try navigating your building with the lights off to understand what level of lighting your emergency lighting can provide.
- Does your Emergency Plan cover power cuts?
- Check terms and conditions of loan agreements
- Check insurance policy - does your building have to be manned for a certain period of time?
- Make sure you have staff/volunteers phone number contact list as part of agreed Emergency Plan. Not just emails!
- Create your own checklist for your site

Top tips

- Stay informed! Check local press for details of planned power cuts.

- Freezer tip: Fill voids with picnic ice packs or bottles of liquid (make sure they are not full!) whilst the freezer is working - a fuller freezer will help maintain low temperature for longer in event of power cut
- Useful to have at least one (fully charged) power pack
- Battery operated FM radio (and appropriate batteries) - BBC Radio 2 and 4 will continue to broadcast on FM
- Remember to document decisions! If the power cut is protracted you are unlikely to remember what was done, when and who authorised it. This will help you with future planning, and when talking to your insurance company if something has occurred. Provision for unplanned power cuts should be incorporated into your museum's Emergency Plan.

Additional resources

- <https://www.ukpowernetworks.co.uk/power-cut/map>
- Text or call 105 and input your postcode to get up to date information from the UK Power Network – this will be the same information as on the power cut map. See www.powercut105.com for more info.
- New SHARE Emergency Plan toolkit (coming soon!)
- Collections Trust, [Emergency Planning for Collections](#)
- Historic England, [Emergency Planning and Fire Advice](#)
- London Museum Development, [Emergency Planning e-learning tool](#)
- London Museum Development, [Pocket Salvage Guide](#)
- National Conservation Service [Benchmarks 3.0](#) (see section 9, Emergency Preparedness)
- <https://www.icon.org.uk/resource/waking-up-collections-a-post-lockdown-guide.html>
(Guidance linked from this page gives suggestions for returning to site after lockdown – many of which may be relevant after a long power cut)