



Public Health Issues Related to Summertime Blackouts

Personal preparation for blackouts is similar to preparation for natural disasters. We recommend that people develop an emergency plan that includes a disaster supply kit. This kit should include enough water, food, and emergency supplies for at least 3 days. Details on emergency plans and supply kits can be found at www.ready.gov.

Heat is the major public health problem related to blackouts for two reasons:

- Extreme heat causes most summertime blackouts
- In a blackout, the main public health intervention for heat-related illness (air conditioning) is unavailable – this represents “a disaster within a disaster”

Heat Facts

- Heat causes about 400 deaths per year in the U.S. – more than all other natural disasters combined
- During the Chicago heat wave of 1995, over 650 people died in under 2 weeks
- ALL HEAT-RELATED DEATHS ARE PREVENTABLE
- The people most at-risk from heat include:
 - The elderly
 - The poor
 - People in inner cities
 - People with chronic illness
 - Homebound people
 - Children under the age of 5 years

CDC RECOMMENDATIONS (in the absence of air conditioning):

- CHECK FREQUENTLY ON THOSE AT HIGH RISK
- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic, non-caffeine liquids
- Reduce strenuous activities
- Take cool showers/baths frequently
- Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing
- Most importantly, cities should have in place a comprehensive Heat Emergency Response Plan

HEAT EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

- SHOULD BE IN PLACE FOR ALL AT-RISK CITIES
- Must have certain critical elements:
 - Close coordination with National Weather Service
 - Effective early warning
 - Consistent, understandable messages directed towards high-risk groups
 - Regular personal contact with at-risk individuals
 - Availability of, and transportation to, emergency shelters
 - Collaboration among municipal agencies, hospitals, industry, NGO’s, and others
- CDC is available to work with cities in the development of these plans

Public Health Issues Related to Summertime Blackouts
(continued from previous page)

For more information, visit www.bt.cdc.gov or call the CDC public response hotline at (888) 246-2675 (English), (888) 246-2857 (Español), or (866) 874-2646 (TTY)

August 15, 2003

Page 2 of 2