

## DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION



## MEMORANDUM

TO: Agency Secretaries  
Department Directors

DATE: January 23, 2001

FROM: Marty Morgenstern, Director  
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SUBJECT: EMPLOYEE LEAVE AND SAFETY DURING ROLLING BLACKOUTS

Given the energy situation and the possibility of rolling blackouts, questions have arisen regarding whether employees should remain at work and what they should do in the event of a blackout at their work site. This memo and attachments outline:

- general leave policy that should be implemented during Stage III energy alerts;
- requirements for agencies and departments to update their Emergency Preparedness Plan (see Attachment A for details); and
- requirements for agencies and departments to distribute a memo to employees as soon as possible explaining what they should do if a blackout occurs at their work site (see Attachments B and C for details).

### GENERAL LEAVE POLICY

*The State's general policy during a Stage III energy alert will be to maintain normal work hours, including situations when management memos direct departments to reduce energy use by turning off certain office equipment and non-essential lights.* However, the State's primary concern is safety, for the public as well as employees and their families. Therefore, the following circumstances should be accommodated.

Any employee whose dependent-care arrangements have been disrupted should be allowed to leave to deal with the situation. In addition, any employee who has reason to believe that the safety of family members and/or home security is jeopardized by a blackout should be allowed to leave for a reasonable period to deal with the situation. Employees should not be charged for such leave as long as it is taken in accord with this policy. Nothing in this policy is intended to reduce normal departmental discretion in these matters.

If you need clarification that a Stage III alert is in effect, you may log on to the California Independent System Operator's Web site at [www2.caiso.com](http://www2.caiso.com).

***If it is determined that an urgent situation exists that poses a health and safety risk for employees to remain at work, a notice revising this general policy will be issued to Agency Secretaries and Department Directors and to Personnel Offices. Each agency/department will be responsible for advising its employees of the leave policy in effect.***

If and when such notice is issued, departments should allow employees to leave for whatever time period is deemed necessary to ensure their safety, based on site-specific determinations by the individual facilities. These site-specific determinations should take into account whether employees will be able to move about safely, including exiting the facility, if there is a blackout affecting that facility.

Departments are encouraged to prepare a strategy for informing employees of the leave policy in effect during a blackout. This may include phone "trees" or recorded phone messages where employees may call for further information.

## **UPDATING EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLANS**

Agencies and departments should immediately update their Emergency Preparedness Plan to ensure blackout issues are addressed. ***(Attachment A outlines issues that the Plan should incorporate.)***

Building Managers are responsible for emergency preparedness for State-owned facilities. However, agency secretaries and department directors are ultimately responsible for emergency preparedness for their employees; it is their responsibility to determine what actions are appropriate for their own employees. This also applies to decisions regarding whether it is appropriate for the public to leave the facility during a blackout.

## **PREPARING EMPLOYEES FOR POSSIBLE BLACKOUTS**

Agencies and departments should distribute a memo to employees as soon as possible explaining what they should do if a blackout occurs at their work site. ***(Attachment B provides examples of conditions the memo should address.)***

The "Safety Tips for Employees" ***(Attachment C)*** may be distributed to employees pending completion of the memo on what to do during a blackout, or be incorporated in that memo.

If you have questions regarding leave policy during a Stage III alert, please contact the Department of Personnel Administration at (916) 322-5193. For questions concerning building safety issues, contact the Department of General Services Emergency Control Center at (916) 323-8777.

Attachment A  
**Emergency Preparedness Plan: Blackouts**

Emergency Preparedness Plans should be updated as soon as possible to ensure the following issues are addressed.

1. **Emergency location:** Each department should assess where employees should relocate, or whether employees should stay put, if a blackout occurs. Generally, areas with the most natural light are best. Remember, rolling blackouts are intended to be temporary situations, lasting roughly 1-2 hours.
2. **Accessibility issues:** Plan for accommodating employees who have limited mobility to ensure they will be able to safely move about or exit the building in the event of a blackout, which may include allowing them to leave early to avoid potential risk associated with exiting the facility during a blackout, or relocating their work space to an area where such risk can be avoided.
3. **Emergency backup:** Ensure that any backup generator sources (e.g., UPS, emergency generators) are tested and readily available to power critical life-safety functions of the building. In the case of battery-operated devices, batteries should be checked and fully charged; in the case of diesel generators, tanks should be topped off and ongoing testing scheduled.
4. **Contact lists:** Ensure that your agency or department's phone trees are current and that a complete and continuously updated list of emergency contacts is distributed, as appropriate; such lists should include people who regularly work after normal business hours.
5. **Building security:** Each agency and department needs to ensure the local number of its California Highway Patrol command center is readily available to the appropriate staff so that the CHP may be contacted, if necessary, during a blackout and afterwards to report on conditions and the safety of employees.

Security plans also should include provisions for the safety of employees who are responsible for handling cash in public areas, as well as plans for securing the cash.

6. **Supplies:** Emergency supply areas should be fully stocked and the room locations published and accessible to staff who require access. Recommended supplies include flashlights, radios, batteries, and some water. If these supplies currently are stocked, their expiration dates should be checked.
7. **24-7 operations:** Special considerations may be required for State operations that run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Attachment B  
**What To Do During a Blackout – Preparing Employees**

A memo should be distributed as soon as possible informing employees what to do if a blackout occurs at their work site, addressing the situations described below as well as any other conditions specific to their work site. Accommodations for employees with limited mobility also should be addressed in the memo.

**1. Lighting**

All lights will go out except the emergency lighting system. This along with lighting from the windows should provide enough light to exit the building safely if necessary. At night, the emergency lighting system will allow safe exiting of the building.

Aisles are to be kept clear of obstacles to avoid tripping and falling. Building emergency response team personnel on each floor should have flashlights available in case they are needed.

**2. Elevators**

Generally, buildings higher than 4 floors have at least one elevator powered by an emergency generator, so it would be available in a power outage. Elevators that are not on emergency power would typically stop where they are when the power goes out.

Passengers in elevators during a power outage should follow procedures posted in the elevator; emergency phones may be used to call for help.

**3. Parking Structures**

State agencies/departments and employees should verify with their parking provider how to enter and exit parking lots and garages during a blackout. Most parking facilities will not have emergency power. There are emergency exit lights to direct people to pedestrian exits.

**4. Communications**

Phone systems may not function, depending on the setup in the building and whether the outage is widespread. Agencies/departments should verify with their phone service provider how their phone system works during a power outage.

**5. Ventilation**

In a power outage, heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems will shut down, and return when power is restored. Some computer rooms are powered by special equipment on a backup generator and will come back on when the generator starts. A lack of ventilation for the amount of time the power may be out should not pose a health or safety concern.

## **6. Security**

Electronic locks will generally fail in the locked condition for entrances. Exiting from the building is always available. Cameras and alarm systems typically have battery backup and should continue to function.

## **7. Access**

Automatic door openers may not function in all facilities during a blackout.

## **8. Fire Alarm System**

These functions will not be interrupted, as these systems have battery backup and are on the emergency generator circuit, if there is one.

## **9. Emergency Generator**

Generally, larger facilities have emergency generators for critical building support systems such as emergency lighting, elevators, fire sprinkler pumps, and fire-life safety systems. These generators will start automatically within moments of a power loss and assume the emergency loads. Typically, there is enough fuel for these systems to operate for at least 8 hours.

## **10. Plumbing**

Buildings with multiple floors have booster pumps on the city water system that may not function in a power outage. This would cause a loss of water pressure on upper floors. In such situations, employees and other building occupants are cautioned to limit use of the restrooms during a power outage.

## Attachment C **Safety Tips for Employees**

Blackouts may occur at any time without warning. Therefore, it is important that you are prepared for such an event to ensure your own safety.

### **Safety precautions during work hours**

- Avoid using elevators. Take the stairs instead. If you are in the elevator when there is a power outage, remain calm and follow the emergency instructions posted inside the elevator. The phone in your elevator may only be connected to the elevator's service operator, who may or may not be able to respond before the blackout ends.
- If you have a disability and need special assistance to exit the building, notify your Emergency Floor Warden of your location so that assistance may be provided.
- Make sure you know where the emergency exits are located in your building.
- Re-familiarize yourself with the evacuation plan for your building.
- Keep a coat or sweater at your desk in case the heating, ventilation, or air conditioning system is not functioning.
- Make sure all aisles, exits, and entrances are clear and unobstructed in the area for which you are responsible.
- Consider keeping a flashlight in your workspace and in your vehicle.
- Make sure you know the location of the first aid/emergency supply area and the location of your office's emergency evacuation plan.

### **Safety precautions after work hours**

- Travel to parking lots in pairs.
- Be aware that the street and parking garages may have little or no lighting.
- Be aware that garage access/exit by card keys will not function, but pedestrian exiting should be available. Although some wooden gates may be manually operated by the garage attendant, metal mesh gates and roll up doors will stay in whatever position they are in when the power goes out.
  - If you are inside the parking structure during a power failure, it is possible you may not be able to exit in your vehicle immediately. If this occurs, remain calm and look for posted instructions near the exit.
  - During a power outage, you will likely not be able to enter a parking structure.
- Be aware that traffic signals also may be affected by the energy outage and, therefore, may not work. Exercise extreme caution at intersections and light-rail crossings.
- Develop a contingency plan for dependent care in case your normal arrangements are disrupted. Be aware that in emergency situations, your dependent care provider's phones may be affected by a power outage.
- Make sure the battery for your cellular phone is charged.
- If walking, take precautions to ensure that you are visible to motorists.

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- Be aware that your home automatic garage doors will not operate without electrical power. Know how to manually open the garage door.
- Secure additional flashlights for your home and, whenever possible, avoid using candles for emergency lighting.
- Follow defensive driver procedures and techniques.