

After Hurricane Ike Frequently Asked Questions

Why is my electricity bill so high when my power was out during Hurricane Ike? Why is my electric bill going to be based on an estimate?

CenterPoint Energy does not sell electricity, and customers do not receive electric bills from us. The company does read meters, restore service after storms, hook up new customers and perform disconnects. Customers receive a bill from their retail electric provider, which they select, and those companies pay us for delivering the electricity.

CenterPoint Energy's meter readers were fulfilling their roles in the company's emergency plan to restore power, so customers who were scheduled to have their meter read during this time will receive a bill based on an estimated reading. The estimated meter reading will take into account the fact that customers were not using electricity during this time. The following month's bill will be based on an actual meter reading, so customers will ultimately only pay for the electricity that they used.

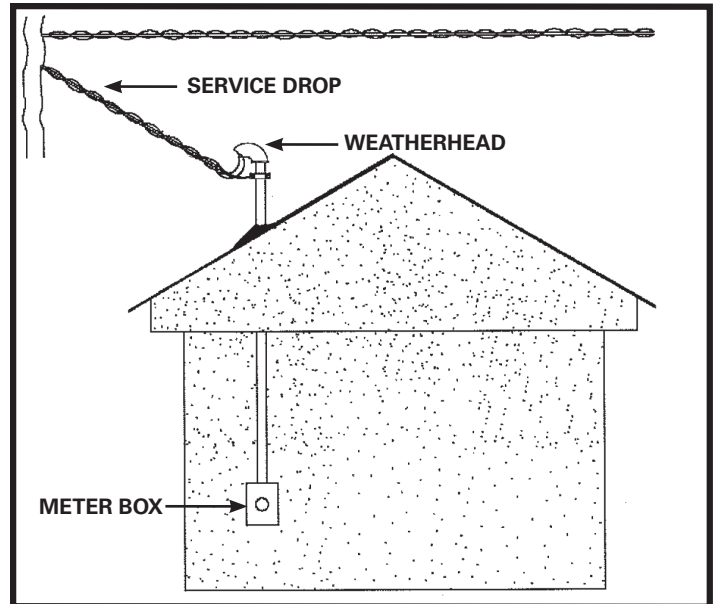
I am moving in or out of a home and need to know when you can connect or disconnect service?

We are back to normal operations for move-in and move-out requests.

Why was I one of the last customers to have my power restored?

The company's first priority is addressing downed power lines and restoring service to key facilities vital to safety, health and welfare, such as hospitals, water treatment plants and public service facilities, such as fire and police stations. Then, the company repairs those major lines that will restore power to the greatest number of customers in the shortest amount of time. During any power outage, we will always continue working hard until every customer has their power. If at any time you do not have power, but your next-door neighbors do, call 713-207-2222 to report your outage. Before calling Customer Service, check your main circuit breaker box and confirm that the main switch is in the "on" position.

CenterPoint Energy makes repairs to the electric delivery system up to the point where it connects to a home or business and will remove meter locks for customers who require an electrician to repair customer meter loops. However, the customer is responsible for repairs if there is damage to the meter enclosure or weatherhead – the point where the line enters the home through a pipe. If the meter enclosure or weatherhead is damaged, our crews will not be able to re-establish service. If in doubt, homeowners should contact a licensed electrician to inspect and make any necessary repairs.



SERVICE DROP – the small power line between the electric pole and the house; CenterPoint Energy will repair this.

WEATHERHEAD – the capped pipe that connects the service drop to the meter box.

METER BOX – the metal box attached to the house, which accepts the CenterPoint Energy glass-enclosed meter.

Will the company pay for repairing yard damage such as ruts done by utility trucks?

We needed to access our utility lines that are in the utility easement in order to do repairs, and our crews do their best to avoid ruts and damages. But like tree debris that is left when our tree crews clear the lines, any resulting clean-up work from the restoration effort is up to the customer. Major property damage complaints can be sent to the Claims department for consideration.

Will the company pay for my spoiled food and generator?

Customers are responsible for any personal costs related to the electric outage. Prior to the storm, CenterPoint Energy recommended that customers prepare to be without power for up to several weeks.

When will your crews return to remove the debris they left?

As part of our restoration plan, tree trimmers working to assist with the restoration effort were not responsible for removing the debris. We apologize for the inconvenience and hope you understand the need to keep the crews working as quickly and efficiently as possible. In the immediate aftermath of a major storm or other natural disaster, property owners, not CenterPoint Energy, are responsible for clearing debris resulting from emergency tree trimming for service restoration caused by fallen or broken trees.

What does CenterPoint Energy do in the case of transformer oil spills?

Transformer oil, like other types of oil (such as motor oil), must be handled and disposed of properly. Customers can call 713-207-2222 to report any transformer oil spills and are asked to avoid contact with the oil and oil residue, as it is very messy and can stain clothing. Customers who come in contact with the oil should wash with soap and water and launder any soiled clothing before wearing. CenterPoint Energy will clean up the area affected by the oil spill. Our environmental clean-up efforts fully comply with environmental regulations by both the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the Environmental Protection Agency. All affected soil and vegetation will be removed and disposed of by CenterPoint Energy.

Can we keep the broken line poles for our own use?

No. Our crews will return to pick up the broken line poles, which belong to CenterPoint Energy.

Why did it take you so long to restore my power?

The majority of damage was caused by large trees that fell onto our power lines as a result of hurricane force winds. Despite the damage, we've restored power to twice as many customers in fewer days than we did following Hurricane Alicia. During a normal restoration process, circuits – the backbone of the company's system that deliver power to 1,000 customers or more – are restored first using the cut and clear process, which identifies problems and reroutes power around the problem areas. Problems include a downed tree, power line or broken pole. Determining where the power is out indicates where additional repairs need to be made. Energizing line fuses, which typically restore service to 100 or more customers, is the next step. Under this process, if your neighbor has power but you do not, there may be a problem on your individual service drop, which will require more time to fix.

Why wasn't CenterPoint Energy more prepared for this hurricane?

We've received both praise and criticism for our response. However, our planning and restoration process was effective. As it became apparent that Ike could make landfall in our service territory, we initiated our Emergency Operating Plan. We ran numerous models, based on the predicted storm path and intensity, to determine potential damage to our system and what sort of resources we'd need to restore it. That plan showed a restoration time of two to three weeks – which we communicated to the public in advance of landfall – and we brought in more than 12,000 additional resources to help. After our initial damage assessment, our models predicted that we would restore 50 to 75 percent of our system within seven to 10 days. On day seven, we restored 50 percent of our customers, and on day 10, 75 percent.

Would underground power lines be better, especially in areas prone to hurricanes? Are you looking at that for future installations?

Underground service is often put into place in newer communities and is in place in downtown Houston, the Texas Medical Center and the Galleria. While underground lines are protected from falling trees and wind-blown debris, faults or operational problems are harder to detect. Also, underground lines are vulnerable to flooding, which can also cause lengthy outages,

and generally it takes longer to repair underground lines when there's a problem. The cost of converting communities to underground service could cost tens of billions of dollars and requires significant disruption as backyards and streets are excavated. When the time and cost are calculated, companies and regulators across the country have routinely concluded that the costs to retrofit far exceed the benefits.

Safety tips after a storm

How can I protect my possessions during a power outage?

Before power is restored, unplug all sensitive equipment, such as computers and plasma screen televisions, and turn off your air conditioner. Leave one light on so you will know when you have power. Once electric service is restored, plug in small appliances, then large appliances and, finally, turn on your air conditioning.

How do I keep my family safe around downed power lines?

Always stay a minimum of 10 feet away from downed or low-hanging power lines and call Customer Service at 713-207-2222 to report them. Treat any power line as if it's energized. DO NOT attempt to remove a tree limb or other object from a power line. If someone makes contact with a downed power line, call 911 for help. Don't try to rescue them because you risk becoming a victim yourself.

How do I safely use a portable generator during a power outage?

Use portable generators in a well-ventilated area. Never run them inside, including your garage. Gasoline-powered generators produce carbon monoxide, and the fumes can be deadly. Turn it off at night while you sleep and when you are away from home to avoid a possible fire hazard. Never connect a portable electric generator or a motor home/RV generator directly to your home's electrical system during a power outage. Electricity could backfeed into the power lines and endanger CenterPoint Energy workers.

What do I do if I smell natural gas?

Leave immediately! Do not use electric switches, telephones (including cell phones) or anything that could cause a spark. Go to a safe location, and then call our natural gas leak hotline at 713-659-2111 or 800-752-8036. Do not use e-mail or the Internet to report a leak, and never assume someone else has reported the leak.

Is it safe to work in my yard now?

Before digging or reinstalling fences, customers need to request that underground utility lines are marked. Digging into buried utility lines can cause serious injury or death. For your safety, you are required by law to call 811. This service will connect you with the state one call center, which alerts participating utility companies, such as electric, gas, cable and phone about the planned digging so they can mark the appropriate location of their underground lines if necessary. Please be prepared for a longer than usual wait time during the next few weeks, and do not dig until the lines have been marked.