

What are power blackouts and how to prepare for them?



The Electricity Supply Emergency Code (ESE Code) has stated that the UK could face power cuts which could be **rolling three-hour disconnections known as blackouts**. Consumers would be given a day's notice that they would lose power. The frequency of any power cuts remains undetermined.

Businesses can apply to their regional network operators to be defined as **"Protected Sites"**, which will continue to receive power supply during blackouts. To qualify as a "Protected Site", a particular site **must be used for the provision of an "approved designated service" and must satisfy certain conditions about its grid connectivity**.

Most employers will not be able to meet these tests and so will remain affected by blackouts.

Although this is currently deemed an *'unlikely'* scenario for the UK, the warning follows concerns over energy supplies in Europe and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

How should employers prepare for blackouts?

Practical steps that employers could take to reduce the impact of blackouts are:



Modifying working times, shift patterns or opening hours to accommodate a blackout. The capability to change working hours on short notice will depend on the wording of the employee's contract, and so this may not be an option for some employees



Investing in battery operated devices and possibly standby generators to maintain power supply for certain equipment



Encourage employees to keep their devices fully charged while working in the office or from home, particularly if they have received prior notification of a blackout

Advise employees on how to use their mobile phone as a Wi-Fi hotspot (if their mobile phone network isn't affected). Employees may also be able to download or print out key documents in advance to work on without access to the internet

Ask homeworking employees who are affected by a blackout to come into the workplace if the workplace remains unaffected. However, this may not be possible for some employees who work from home for reasons such as childcare or other caring commitments.



Employers should consider the Health and Safety implications of a blackout

Loss of power will create additional and unusual health and safety risks.

If an employer intends to continue operating its workplace during blackouts, it is strongly advisable to carry out a detailed risk assessment which looks at how this will work in practice.

Health and safety issues to consider include:



Loss of light



Loss of heating/
aircon



Limited methods
of communicating



Sudden stoppages
of equipment
or machinery

Most importantly, employers should keep employees informed about their plans for dealing with blackouts.