

EMERGENCY LIGHTING

Natural disasters strike quickly and often without warning. In the case of many of these disasters--like winter storms, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and many others--people can be left stranded without any way to buy emergency supplies. Stores are usually closed down during these disasters, and much of the time, there isn't a way to get to these businesses anyway, thanks to the damage that storms and other disasters can do to roads and buildings.

That's why it is vital that people begin to think about how they will prepare for all the dangers and contingencies of natural disasters now, instead of when the storm actually hits. Once people are in the middle of the emergency, there will be no time for them to prepare, and if people don't know where their emergency supplies are, and what those supplies consist of, they could suffer injury or disease because of unsafe conditions.

One of the most important, yet least thought-out aspects of emergency preparedness is emergency lighting. Too many people assume that if they have a few flashlights scattered around the house, then they're prepared for any power blackouts or other emergency lighting situations. Unfortunately, there is a great deal more to alternative lighting than just a couple of low-powered flashlights.

When people begin to examine the world of emergency preparedness, they quickly learn that there are many different options when it comes to surviving a power blackout; and what's more, there are specific types of lights they should use for different emergencies for the sake of safety.

To start with something people are already very familiar with, there are actually a number of different kinds of flashlights, light bulbs, and batteries people can use. The typical flashlight runs on alkaline batteries, which are the typical department store Duracell or Energizer batteries. These power sources last a few years, but can run out even if they are hardly ever used during that time.

Another kind of battery people may want to look into for their flashlights is lithium batteries. This type generally lasts twice as long as the alkaline batteries; at their best, lithium batteries will last about ten years. However, they too will run out even with minimum use.

The alternative to keeping dozens of replacement batteries somewhere in the house is to buy an alternative power source flashlight. These range from the hand crank flashlight to the kind people just shake a bit. Some flashlights can even gather solar energy during the day to be used at night.

Flashlights are of course a great thing to have around for those power outages that are just due to some failure at the power plant or faulty power lines. These outages usually last an hour or two, and having flashlights nearby can help alleviate the discomfort of trying to work everything in the dark and without electricity.

However, when it comes to more serious emergencies like severe natural disasters, flashlights are far from the best option. Many of them are inconvenient because they must be held, and even the ones that don't use batteries can be difficult since they need to be cranked or shaken fairly often to give out

light. And with continuous use, the glow of a flashlight eventually fades until people can't see anything at all.

That's why another excellent option for electricity-free lighting is lanterns and lamps. These devices can run on a variety of power supplies, including kerosene, Coleman fuel, and propane. The main advantages of these light sources are that they burn brightly and don't require any upkeep if they are lit correctly in the first place. They also generally last longer than flashlights and can be reused if there is extra fuel around.

The problem with these lighting devices, however, is that if they are not handled correctly, they can be dim or give off a lot of smoke, or can even cause injury. Kerosene lamps must be trimmed correctly--either in a V or an A shape--or else they will not give off much light and will likely give off smoke. Coleman fuel is even more dangerous since it can be explosive. It's dangerous to keep around the house, and they must be filled outside. Propane is less volatile, but it also burns less brightly.

However, despite these disadvantages, having lamps and lanterns around is usually a great idea for those trying to get through a disaster, thanks to their "hands-off" qualities and the time for which they burn--in the case of kerosene lamps, 45 hours.

If neither of these options sound appealing, or if people are just looking for a variety of ways to light their houses during an emergency, the safest, cleanest devices are cyalume sticks, commonly known as glow sticks or [light sticks](#). In one particular natural disaster, actually, it is imperative that people use these cyalume sticks until they are certain it is safe; earthquakes can rupture natural gas lines and make areas unsafe for everyone.

Any other light source, including flashlights and lamps, not to mention candles, can and often will set off an explosion that will injure or even kill those around it. Light sticks are the only sure way to know that everyone will be safe, while still being able to see. These cyalume sticks provide light for up to 12 hours, and they also provide an added benefit--kids who might otherwise be frightened of the disaster will have a fun time with these completely safe light sources. Remember, the greatest number of people who die in earthquakes do not die in the original shaking, but rather in the dangerous aftermath. Don't be a statistic--make sure that there are safe lighting materials at the ready so everyone can stay safe.

Finally, one of the most basic natural lighting devices is, of course, candles. People can buy whatever kinds they like--wax or tallow--but the tallow candles burn brighter, longer, and give off less smoke than their wax counterparts. Emergency preparedness stores like [The Biggest](#) downside to candles is their ability to start fires and injure people, especially when small children are around. If people are planning on using candles as their main source of light during an emergency, they must first be sure that their kids understand the dangers, and that they will be able to place these candles well out of the reach of any children who are too young to understand. A remedy for this danger is candle holders and lanterns, which will help protect these products from disaster. People should also remember to blow out their candle if they are going to sleep, since fires start more often because of unattended flame than anything else.

There are numerous alternatives to electric lighting--all with their benefits and downsides. People will benefit from having a variety of these light sources rather than just placing all their trust in, say, a kerosene lamp. Since different emergencies call for different products, it is always best to be prepared and keep a variety around. The most

important thing is, however, that people think about it and plan for power outages now, before the stores are closed and they are left in the dark because they didn't plan for disaster soon enough.