

Smartphones as WiFi Hotspots

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Fire season has started, and with it PSPS are coming up as they do every year. When your home Internet is down during these shutoffs, smartphones can be made into a WiFi “hotspot” to access the outside world for news and information if cellular towers are functioning.

Smartphones have Internet access on their own via their cellular network, but they can also provide WiFi hotspot Internet access for your iPad, Android tablet, or laptop computer where using a keyboard or larger screen may be desirable. iPhones and Android phones have the capability to act as a WiFi hotspot similar to WiFi hotspots in coffee shops, public places, and hotels.

Given cybersecurity risks, creating your own WiFi hotspot on your smartphone is recommended if using your computer or tablet when in public places or staying in hotels, where there is no security on their WiFi networks. Depending upon your smartphone data plan, it is possible to go over your data limit, but the additional cost is usually minimal. In emergency situations, like wildfires/evacuations, cellular companies are usually generous about forgiving data overages.

Setup guidelines for iPhones and Android follow. Once it's set up, you can activate the service at any time and reconnect your device or computer.

On your iPhone, go to Settings > Cellular > Personal Hotspot or Settings > Personal Hotspot and make sure that it's on. Then verify the Wi-Fi password and name of the phone. On the device that you want to connect to the hotspot, go to Settings > Wi-Fi and look for your iPhone in the list. Then tap the Wi-Fi network to join. If asked, enter the password for your personal hotspot. To disconnect, go to settings > Personal Hotspot or Settings > Cellular > Personal Hotspot and turn it off.

Android phones may differ slightly since they are from different manufacturers (Samsung, Google Pixel, Sony, Motorola, and many more) and their configurations differ. The easiest explanation is to go to Settings, then Network & Internet, then Hotspot & Tethering. Set up the hotspot name and make sure you set up a password so no one else can access it. Some Android hotspots can be set up to turn off automatically when not in use.

In the next PSPS, turn on the hotspot and then select your smartphone WiFi hotspot name on your tablet or computer and connect to it instead of your usual home connection.

Now that it's fire season, make sure your electronic devices are charged up at all times. It's also a good idea to have a way to charge devices when the power is out. If you need assistance with setting up your smartphone for WiFi hotspot, go to the OTLC web site at www.oakmont-learning.org and fill in the contact form.

For those with less tech-savvy neighbors, please encourage them to read the tech articles in the “paper” version, online Oakmont News at www.oakmontvillage.com, or online at www.oakmont-learning.org. If your neighbors don't have smartphones, it's time for them to get one for access to information in emergencies.