

Portable Power Options for Power Outages

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Given the past few years with fires and PG&E PSPS outages, most of us realize how important our smartphones and other electronic devices are for emergency information. Many in Oakmont have purchased generators or solar with batteries for power during outages. Generators are noisy and solar with battery backup costs many thousands of dollars. Are there less expensive and simpler tools to provide some temporary power for ourselves in our homes?

There are numerous options, depending upon needs. Most portable options are powered by a rechargeable lithium battery, sometimes called an “inverter”. Some can be recharged via an electrical outlet, solar panel, or even your car cigarette lighter. A handheld solar powered device solely for charging your phones or tablets is a very basic tool, but it does not provide power for the basics, such as lights or a fan. A “portable power station” can power enough to make life a little better during the outage. It might charge your phone or tablet, provide light from a lamp, operate a small appliance such as coffee maker, even provide power to a CPAP machine or a fan.

Before purchasing, think about what is most important to you? What do you need to power: phone or tablet, lights, fan, CPAP, etc? How many and what type of outlets or ports do you need? These small portable devices will not keep your large refrigerator running, however, some will provide power to a small portable refrigerator.

Things to consider are many: How long will they provide a charge? How long will it take to recharge the power station? Can you connect it to a small solar panel to charge? Can you be recharging the device at the same time you are using it to provide power for your phone or lamp? How big and how heavy is this device? Can you move it to store it when not in use?

Options range from smaller than a car battery to twice the size of a car battery. All should be plugged into an outlet to have a full charge before the power goes out. Recharging can be done via car cigarette lighter or connecting to a solar panel. AC outlets and USB outlets vary on each model. Some have a light on the device itself or have screens to show you what percentage of the charge remains. Some manufacturers offer more AC and USB outlets and claim to run lights for 32 hours, a mini cooler for 8 hours, or a CPAP for 9 hours.

Start with Internet searches for “portable power stations”. This can be a good way to familiarize yourself with many options and the costs associated with each. For an electronic copy of this article, visit the OTLC web site at www.oakmont-learning.org or the online 2/12/22 Oakmont News.