Power Outages and Reliability
Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why do my lights blink off and on?

A. If your lights blink off and on once or twice, you may be concerned there is something wrong. Usually, this is the result of a temporary problem such as a tree limb on the line that eventually falls off or an animal making contact with lines.

There are devices on our lines called reclosers. Reclosers are a circuit breaker type of device that has the ability to open the circuit for a fault but then to automatically close after a short period of time to restore power. Most problems on a power system are temporary. The recloser senses these issues and attempts to allow the fault to clear before remaining open and creating a prolonged outage. This is very effective in many cases and prevents small problems from causing big ones. In some cases, the fault doesn't clear and after a programmed sequence of operations, the recloser will open until crews can arrive and clear the problem.

Please be advised there is typically no "power surge" on the distribution network as a result of these recloser operations. It is a lot like flipping a light switch off and back on. There are unique circumstances that can occur which will produce surges within your home. If you have equipment damage, we will inform you when these situations occur.

Q. It's a beautiful, sunny day and my power is out. Why?

A. Although weather is a big factor when it comes to power going out, there are many, many other causes of outages. An underground cable may have failed, a transformer reached the end of its life, a connection burned up -- any number of equipment failures can occur. CREC regularly inspects and repairs issues before they cause an outage but there will always be equipment failures from time to time.

Another cause of an outage may be due to trees that fall and take down power lines. CREC's right-of-way crews continuously clear the right-of-ways along our distribution system. However, many trees are large and are outside of where we can legally clear. When they fall, it is often on our lines. This may cause a long outage, especially if poles are broken when the line is taken down.

Perhaps the most frustrating cause of outages is animals, in particular, squirrels. Squirrels are very handy when it comes to getting around our efforts to guard transformers and wires from them. CREC has yet to come across a cost-effective, foolproof method of preventing these outages, and despite using squirrel guarding of several types, they still manage to cause problems.

Q. Why is my power out if all of my lines are underground?

A. Underground lines are indeed more reliable, at least until the cable reaches its end of life, but almost all underground subdivisions are fed by overhead lines. Underground cable is cost-prohibitive to employ throughout the distribution system and there are locations for which underground cable is not practical. Overhead lines are less expensive, easier to repair and it is normally a faster process to locate trouble. So, although your lines may not be up on poles, the lines that bring power from the substation to your area most likely are overhead.

Q. My power is out but the houses across the street have power. Why?

A. Our power is distributed in phases. There are three separate wires that feed most areas. These phases need to be balanced to function optimally.

Your side of the street may be on "A" phase and a squirrel caused the fuse to blow feeding the homes on that phase. The other side of the street may be on "B" or "C" phase. The squirrel didn't bother their line, thus, their lights are still on.

Q. When there is a major outage, why is my home the last to see crews arrive?

A. After a big storm or other major outage event, there may be widespread damage to a feeder. A feeder is the part of the system of lines that runs from the substation to the tap lines in your local area. These feeders may be several miles in length.

Crews start at the substation and work toward the end of the lines. Many times with a storm there are multiple issues on the line. If they started addressing problems at the end of the line, any problems upstream would not allow the feeder circuit or the substation to be re-energized until everything was repaired. By starting close to the substation, the lines can be re-energized as crews complete repairs until all work is complete and everyone is restored. They are working forward in a progressive manner to repair all the problems.

This does not cause your power to be restored slower, rather it is the most efficient way to get everyone's power restored as quickly as possible.