READY AT HOME · VOLUME 4

Cooking & Warmth

Without mains power

Radiators, oil boilers, stoves and lighting a proper fire
Cooking on camping stoves and the BBQ; haybox cooking
Draughts, layers, one warm room, safe homemade light



THE SERIES

0 Start Here
1 Just Add Water
2 Power Cuts & Storms
3 Water & Sanitation
4 Cooking & Warmth
5 First Aid
6 Symptoms & Home Care
7 Home Systems & Repairs
8 Fire Safety & Security
9 Communications
10 Grab Bags & Kits
11 Pantry & Stockpile
12 Outdoor Skills
13 Kids, Morale & Wellbeing
14 Offline Knowledge &
15 Other Emergencies

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Contents

1. Keeping your heating working 3

Bleeding a radiator . . . 3

Oil (kerosene) boilers . . . 3

2. Lighting a proper fire 4

3. Cooking without mains power 4

How much cooking gas to keep . . . 5

Haybox (retained-heat) cooking . . . 5

4. Staying warm 6

One warm room . . . 7

Stopping draughts . . . 7

Portable gas heaters . . . 8

Warmth tricks that work . . . 8

5. Light without power 8

6. Hypothermia 9

Check on people . . . 9

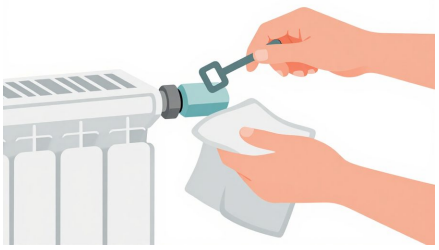
Emergency numbers & the series 10

The Ready At Home series . . . 10

1. Keeping your heating working

Most heating problems in a cold snap are small ones you can fix yourself in a few minutes. Knowing how saves a cold night waiting for a call-out.

Bleeding a radiator



If a radiator is cold at the top and warm at the bottom, air is trapped in it.

1. Turn the heating off and let the radiators cool (hot water can spray).
2. Hold a cloth under the bleed valve at the top corner. Fit a radiator key (a few euro in any hardware shop; keep two).
3. Turn the key a quarter turn anticlockwise. You'll hear air hissing out.
4. As soon as water starts to dribble out, close it again (clockwise). Don't over-tighten.
5. Do every radiator that needed it, starting downstairs.
6. Check the boiler pressure gauge. Sealed systems usually sit at 1-1.5 bar when cold. If it has dropped below 1, top it up using the filling loop as your boiler manual describes.

Oil (kerosene) boilers



Boiler stopped and a red light is on (lockout)

1. Check the obvious: is the timer on, the thermostat turned up, and is there oil in the tank?
2. Press the reset button **once**. The burner should try to start within a minute.
3. If it locks out again, wait 15 minutes and try **one** more time.
4. If it still won't run, stop. Repeated resets pump unburnt oil into the boiler, which can be dangerous when it finally lights. Call an OFTEC-registered technician.



If you've run out of oil

1. Check the tank gauge or dip it with a clean stick.
2. After a delivery, wait about an hour before restarting. This lets any sludge stirred up from the bottom of the tank settle.
3. Make sure the valve at the tank outlet is open and the filter bowl isn't clogged.
4. Many burners need the air bled from the fuel line after running dry. Some models do this themselves after a reset or two; others have a bleed screw on the burner pump.
5. If your manual shows how, and you're comfortable: fit a clear tube to the bleed screw into a jar, open the screw, press reset, and close it once oil flows with no bubbles. Otherwise ask your service engineer to show you at the next service.

Avoid running out

- Never let the tank fall below a quarter. Order before a cold spell; delivery waits can stretch to a week or two in winter.
- Fit a lock to the tank cap and consider a remote gauge.
- Have the boiler serviced every year.

2. Lighting a proper fire

An open fire or stove is a great backup, but only if it's lit well and the chimney is clean. A cold, smoky fire wastes fuel and coats the chimney with tar.



The top-down fire

1. Open the stove's air vents fully (or the damper on an open fire).
2. Bottom layer: 2-3 larger logs or a few lumps of smokeless fuel, side by side.
3. Middle: a layer of smaller split logs crossways on top.
4. Top: a generous layer of dry kindling with 2 firelighters (or twists of newspaper) in it.
5. Light the top. It burns down through the layers with little smoke and needs no fiddling.
6. After 15-20 minutes, once the bigger logs are burning well, close the vents partly to slow the burn.

Do	Don't
Burn dry, seasoned wood (under 20% moisture), smokeless fuel or approved briquettes	Burn wet wood, painted or treated timber, pallets, plastic or rubbish
Have the chimney swept at least once a year (twice if burning a lot of wood)	Leave a fire burning overnight in an open grate, or leave the room without a fireguard if children are about
Fit a carbon monoxide alarm in the room and keep a fireguard in front	Use petrol, paraffin or barbecue fluid to light a fire
Store fuel off the ground and under cover, a few days' supply indoors to dry	Close a stove right down to smoulder all night; it causes tar build-up

Ireland's solid-fuel rules ban the sale of smoky coal and of wet wood in small quantities. Buy wood marked 'Ready to Burn' or check it with a cheap moisture meter.

3. Cooking without mains power

Stove	Fuel	Use indoors?	Notes
Single-burner camping stove	Butane cartridge	Only in a well-ventilated room, window open, CO alarm, never left alone	Cheap and quick. Butane struggles below about 5°C.
Twin-burner camping stove	Propane bottle	Better outdoors or a well-ventilated porch	Good for family meals.
Meths (Trangia-type)	Methylated spirits	Ventilated room, on a non-flammable surface	Silent, fuel keeps for years. Flame is hard to see.
Wood-burning stove	Wood, smokeless fuel	Yes, if it's an installed stove with a swept chimney	Cook and boil a kettle on top.
Charcoal or gas BBQ	Charcoal, propane	**No**. Outdoors only	Gives off carbon monoxide; never bring it inside, even when cooling.
Kelly kettle / rocket stove	Twigs, scrap wood	No	Boils water fast, outside.



Boiling a kettle on the barbecue

1. Set the BBQ up outdoors on level ground, well away from the house, sheds and fences.
2. Gas: light a burner (or the side burner) and put a stovetop kettle or pot straight on the grill.
3. Charcoal: light it and wait until the coals are covered in grey ash (20-30 minutes). Spread them into a tight pile under the kettle.
4. A metal stovetop kettle or saucepan with a lid works; never an electric kettle.
5. Fill flasks with every kettle you boil, so the next cup needs no fuel.
6. Let charcoal die out completely outside before putting it away. Never bring it into a house, porch, garage or tent.

Stove safety

- Use stoves on a stable, non-flammable surface away from curtains and cupboards.
- Change gas cartridges outdoors, away from any flame.
- Keep a fire blanket within reach and children well back.
- Turn off at the valve when finished. Store cylinders upright, outside the living space.

How much cooking gas to keep

Task	Gas used (roughly)	Per 230 g cartridge
Boil 1 litre of water	10-15 g	15-20 litres boiled
One meal bag (350-500 ml water)	5-8 g	about 30 meals
Simmer a meal 10 minutes	15-20 g	about 12 meals
A simple day for one person (3 meals, 2 hot drinks)	40-60 g	about 4 days

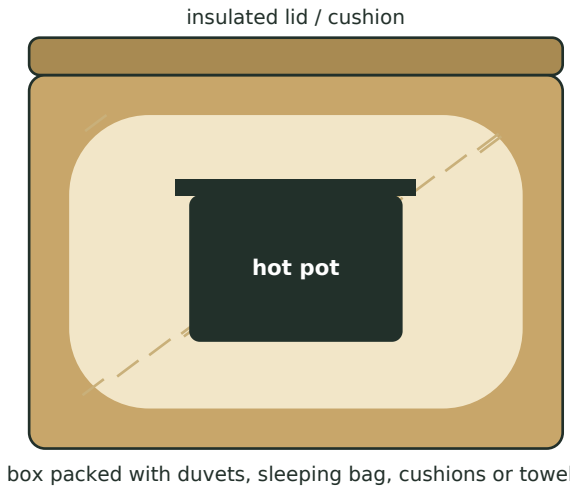
Approximate for a canister stove with a lid on the pot. Plan on one 230 g cartridge per person every 3-4 days. Meals that only need hot water added (Volume 1), couscous, instant noodles and porridge oats use the least fuel and water.

Haybox (retained-heat) cooking

The best way to save fuel. Food keeps cooking in its own heat inside an insulated box, like a slow cooker with no power. Good for rice, porridge, pasta, stews and the meal bags in Volume 1.



A box, a lidded pot and old bedding is all you need.



1. Bring the pot to a full boil (stew: simmer 10 min first).
2. Lid on tight. Move it straight into the box (no peeking).
3. Pack insulation all round and on top.
4. Leave it: rice 30-45 min, porridge overnight, stews 2-4 h, meal bags 30 min.
5. Reheat to boiling before serving if it's below 63°C (piping hot).

Figure 1. How to haybox.

Food safety

Food should still be steaming hot (above 63°C) when you take it out. If it has cooled to lukewarm, bring it back to a full boil before eating. Don't leave cooked food in the box overnight to eat later.

4. Staying warm

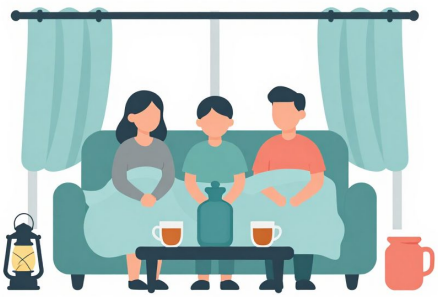
Without heating, a typical Irish house cools to about 10-12°C within a day or two in winter. That's chilly but manageable if you heat people rather than the whole house.



Figure 2. Layering: base, mid, outer, plus hat, socks and gloves. Trapped air does the work, so several loose layers beat one thick one.

Layer	What to wear
Base	Wool, merino or synthetic thermals. Avoid cotton next to the skin; it holds damp.
Mid	Fleece or a wool jumper. Two thin layers beat one thick.
Outer	A down or synthetic jacket indoors if needed; windproof and waterproof outside.
Ends	Hat, thick socks, slippers, fingerless gloves. Cold hands and feet make you miserable fastest.

One warm room

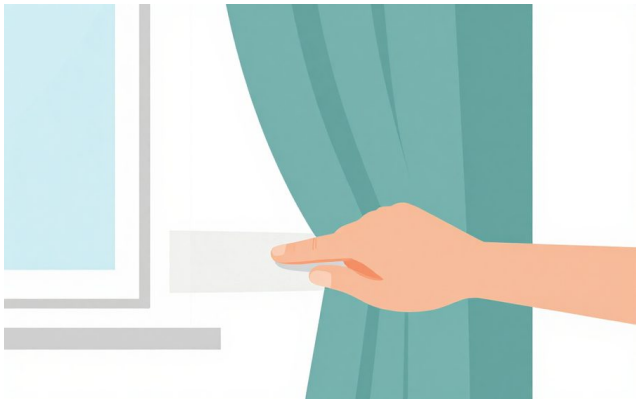


- Pick one room: the smallest, sunniest one with the fewest outside walls.
- Shut the doors to every other room and put draught snakes along the bottom.
- Open curtains in sunshine; close them, plus a blanket, as soon as the light goes.
- Rugs, blankets or even cardboard on bare floors.
- Everyone in together: each person gives off about as much heat as a 100 W bulb.
- Sleep there too if the rest of the house gets very cold.

Stopping draughts



Draught snake and heavy curtain at the door.



Foam strip and film kit on a leaky window.

Where	Quick fix	Cost
Bottom of doors	Draught snake (or a rolled towel); brush strip screwed to the door	€5-15
Door and window frames	Self-adhesive foam or rubber strip in the gap	€5-10 a roll
Single-glazed or leaky windows	Shrink-film secondary glazing kit (applied with a hairdryer), or bubble wrap pressed onto wet glass	€10-20
Letterbox and keyhole	Letterbox brush, keyhole cover	€5
Unused chimney	Chimney balloon or a removable board. **Remove before lighting a fire.**	€20-30
Floorboards and skirting	Flexible filler or a rug	€5

Keep air vents open

Don't block wall vents or window trickle vents in any room with a fire, stove, boiler or gas heater. They supply the air those appliances need to burn safely.

Portable gas heaters



A cabinet heater running on a butane or propane bottle can warm a living room for a day or so per bottle. Used carefully, it's a useful backup.

- Buy one with an oxygen depletion sensor (ODS) and tip-over cut-off.
- Keep a window open a little and a working CO alarm in the room.
- Never use one in a bedroom, bathroom, small room, caravan or tent, or while asleep.
- Keep it a metre from furniture and curtains. Change bottles outdoors.
- A wood-burning stove that's properly installed is safer for long outages.

Warmth tricks that work

Do	Why
Hot water bottle with hot (not boiling) water, in a cover	Boiling water perishes rubber and can scald. Replace bottles every couple of years.
Eat regularly and have hot drinks	Your body turns food into heat.
Move about every hour	Ten minutes of activity warms you through (Volume 13 has ideas).
Sleep in a hat, in a sleeping bag under the duvet	Several degrees warmer than a duvet alone.
Put a mat or blanket **under** you	You lose heat into a cold mattress or floor.
Foil (Mylar) blanket, as a last resort	Wrapped inside your clothes or bedding it holds body heat; on its own it's crinkly and gets damp. Blankets and sleeping bags are better.

Never use these to heat a room

Gas hobs or ovens, barbecues, patio heaters, camping stoves or generators. They give off carbon monoxide, a gas you can't see or smell (see Volume 2).

5. Light without power

LED headtorches and lanterns are the safest and brightest option (Volume 2). Candles and oil lamps are a backup. Lit flames are the most common cause of house fires during power cuts, so use them carefully.



A cooking-oil lamp in a jar.



Tin candles with home-made wicks.

Light	How to make it	Notes
Cooking-oil lamp	Bend a paperclip or florist's wire into a stand that holds a cotton wick (a strip of old T-shirt or a shoelace) upright. Put it in a jam jar with 2-3 cm of olive or vegetable oil; the wick should stick up about 5 mm above the oil. Let the wick soak, then light it.	Olive oil is hard to ignite if spilled, which makes it a safer choice. About an hour per tablespoon.
Tuna-tin lamp	A tin of tuna in oil: push a hole in the lid, feed in a twist of paper or cotton, let it soak for a minute, light.	Burns 1-2 hours. Eat the tuna afterwards.
Fat or wax candle	Melt lard, dripping or leftover candle wax in a pan of hot water (never over a direct flame). Pour into a tin with a cotton wick held upright by a clothes peg or pencil across the top.	Lard candles are smoky and smell of cooking; wax is cleaner.
Crayon candle	Stand a wax crayon upright in a dish and light the tip of the paper label.	Lasts about 30 minutes. Fun in an emergency, not a long-term light.

Flame safety

- Always stand flames on a plate or tray, on a stable surface, away from curtains, books and anything that can catch.
- Never leave one burning in an empty room or while sleeping.
- Keep them out of reach of children and pets.
- Have a working smoke alarm on every floor (Volume 8).

6. Hypothermia

Hypothermia means the body's core has cooled below 35°C. It can creep up slowly indoors in a cold house, especially for older people, babies, and anyone who is unwell or has been drinking.

EARLY	Shivering, cold pale skin, tiredness, clumsy hands, slow speech. Get them warm and dry now.
SERIOUS	Shivering stops, confusion, very drowsy, slow breathing, hard to wake. Call 112.
BABIES	May look well but feel cold, are limp, very quiet and won't feed. Call 112.

Figure 3. Signs to look for.

1. Move them somewhere warmer and out of the wind. Call 112 if you see the serious signs.
2. Swap wet clothes for dry ones.
3. Wrap them in blankets or a sleeping bag, including the head (not the face).
4. Warm the middle of the body first: chest, neck, armpits, groin. Wrapped warm bottles or your own body heat work well.
5. If they're alert and can swallow, give warm sweet drinks and food. No alcohol.
6. Be gentle. Don't rub limbs, use a hot bath or put heat directly on the skin.
7. Stay with them and keep checking on them.

Check on people

During any cold-weather outage, look in on older neighbours and anyone living alone at least once a day. A warm drink, a spare blanket or a lift to somewhere with heat makes a real difference.

Emergency numbers & the series

Service	Number	Use it for
Emergency services	**112 or 999**	Ambulance, Garda, fire, coast guard. Works from any phone, any network.
ESB Networks	1800 372 999	Power cuts, fallen or damaged lines (24/7)
Gas Networks Ireland	1800 20 50 50	Smell of gas (24/7). Call from outside the house.
Uisce Éireann (Irish Water)	1800 278 278	Water outages, burst mains, boil-water notices
HSELive	1800 700 700	Health service information
Public Poisons Line	01 809 2166	Advice if someone has swallowed or touched something harmful (8am-10pm daily)
Samaritans	116 123	Anyone struggling to cope (24/7)
Text About It	Text HELLO to 50808	Free text support (24/7)
Childline	1800 66 66 66	Children and young people up to 18 (24/7)
Your county council	_____	Roads, flooding, local emergency centres
Met Éireann	met.ie / Met Éireann app	Weather warnings

Numbers checked November 2026. Write in your county council's number above, and your own local numbers (GP, out-of-hours doctor, pharmacy, vet, neighbours) in Volume 0.

The Ready At Home series

Vol	Title	What it covers
0	Start Here	Household plan & emergency numbers
1	Just Add Water	Home-dehydrated emergency meals
2	Power Cuts & Storms	Getting through long outages
3	Water & Sanitation	Storing, treating, toilets
4	**Cooking & Warmth**	Without mains power
5	First Aid	Step-by-step emergency care
6	Symptoms & Home Care	Red flags, minor illness, medicines
7	Home Systems & Repairs	Shut-offs, leaks, storm damage, floods
8	Fire Safety & Security	Alarms, escape plans, extinguishers
9	Communications	Family plan, radios, signals
10	Grab Bags & Kits	72-hour, car, child & pet kits
11	Pantry & Stockpile	A 30-day food store you rotate
12	Outdoor Skills	Fire, shelter, knots, navigation
13	Kids, Morale & Wellbeing	Keeping people okay
14	Offline Knowledge & Media	Libraries, maps & media without internet
15	Other Emergencies	Radiation, chemicals, heat, illness, cut off

This series gives general preparedness guidance. It is not a substitute for professional medical, electrical, gas or structural advice, or for a certified first-aid course. In an emergency, call 112 or 999 and follow the call-taker's instructions.

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