

Pinecrest

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A few pre-hurricane precautions that could save you big bucks!

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South Florida homeowners know the routine for hurricane preparation — stock up on extra batteries, water, nonperishable food, medications, cash from the ATM, a full tank of gas in the car.

But, a typical homeowner probably gives no thought to the electric meter (called the “meter can”) on the outside of the house. The entire unit consists of the meter can, a conduit or pipe containing wires, and something called a “weatherhead” that caps off the conduit running upward from the meter can. If any of these parts is damaged by gale force winds or falling tree branches, the repair expense will be sizable.

Assuming that Florida Power and Light will take care of the damage is not necessarily true. Here's why: In homes where the electrical wires run through the air from the FPL pole to your house and are attached to the exterior of the building (rather than installed underground as for most new construction homes), the property owner is responsible for damage when a tree branch, for example, falls against the wires, pulling down the meter can or conduit.

FP&L takes care of repairing damage to the power poles and to the wires connecting the power pole to

the residence. Prior to turning on the power in your neighborhood after the hurricane, FPL does a site inspection of every house. If your meter can is damaged, the crew will disconnect your system from the pole and move on to the next houses that are capable of having power returned.

Your job will then be to contact a licensed electrician who will pull the needed permits, do the repairs and get the required inspections. All this could delay your home getting electric power for another two to three weeks or longer, depending on how busy the FPL crews are after the storm, and depending on how long it takes to get permits and inspection for your repair work. Special note: If your meter can has to be replaced, your electrical service will have to be brought up to current codes, not the codes applicable when originally installed.

So what can you do ahead of time to avoid this delay and possible expense? Trim trees located near your electric meter and check to see that the meter is securely attached to the exterior of the house. This reduces the chance of your footing a large repair bill.

GENERATOR TIPS

If you purchase a generator to power your home after the hurricane, keep these tips in mind:

- Get a transfer switch that will link the generator to the home's electrical panel.

WIREMASTER

- Place the generator away from open windows and doors. Residents have died from carbon monoxide gas produced by the generator and allowed to enter the house interior.

- For safety reasons, do not place the generator in the garage for the period of usage.

- For security reasons, put the generator in a place where it can be locked up and protected from theft.

POWER VOCABULARY Electricity Meter —

A device measuring the amount of electrical energy supplied to or produced by a residence, business or machine. The most common type of meter measures kilowatt hours.

Weatherhead

(weathercap or service entrance cap) — Weatherproof entry point for above-ground electrical wiring or telephone lines into a home or business. It typically tops a pipe-like conduit and is shaped like a hood, required by most electrical and building codes.

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