



Digital phone lines and power cuts

Recently on TV there have been adverts reminding us all about the BT Digital Switchover. For the vast majority of people it will be a big improvement to the quality of calls without any downside.

<https://digitalphoneswitchover.com/>

However, for us in our rural village there is a caveat...

The older analog phone lines were able to provide power to a landline's handset, so during a powercut the phones would still work and you could contact someone in the case of an emergency. But when the lines are all switched to digital this won't be possible anymore.

(NB. If you get your home phone service from Gigaclear then you already have a digital line!)

So, in the event of a powercut *and* you need to make an emergency call, what are your options? I've installed all of them so here's my recommendations.

Use your mobile phone

This is probably the easiest for most people. Don't worry if you don't have a brilliant signal as emergency 999 calls are automatically routed to the strongest signal and take priority over any other calls in the local area.

If your house is anything like mine and has foil backed insulation then it's likely that the walls will block the mobile signal getting into your house, so you may need to stand outside.

What if you have a telecare system or burglar alarm?

You will need to talk to your provider and see what they recommend. I recently helped a neighbour upgrade their telecare pendant to one that has a mobile SIM card so that it doesn't rely on the landline.

What if you still want to be able to rely on your landline during a powercut?

Both BT and Gigaclear have a range of options. If you are registered with them as a vulnerable customer (i.e. elderly, disabled etc.) then they will probably offer you one of these options for free:

Backup phone

<https://www.bt.com/help/landline/digital-voice-phones/hybrid-phone>

This is a handset that, in the event of a powercut, will switch to the mobile signal instead.

I know someone in Little Wittenham who has one of these, but I'm not convinced it's the best option as it's just like using your mobile phone indoors, so isn't really any additional benefit. But it will always have a fully charged battery when the power goes out, so it should last up to 8hrs which may be more than your mobile has left.



Battery Backup Unit (BBU)

<https://www.bt.com/help/landline/set-up-battery-back-up>

<https://gigaclear.com/vulnerable-customer-policy>

This battery is constantly being charged by the mains and sits between the power socket on your wall and the broadband equipment. It will ensure it all continues to work during a powercut and can continue to provide power for up to an hour depending on what you have connected to it.

However, while they will keep the internet connection going, they *do not provide power to your landline's handset*, so in order to make any calls you would need to use your mobile phone and ensure it is set to make Wi-Fi calls.



Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS)

If all of this still sounds too unreliable then your most robust option would be to get a UPS which is just the professional version of a BBU. They come in many different sizes and capacities so you can choose the one that powers all your equipment for as long as you like.

(If you already have solar panels and a battery for your house then you should be fine!)



Which is my recommendation?

For me, using my mobile will be enough. I know I have a decent signal, and that it will be prioritised if I dial 999 anyway.

If you're a vulnerable customer then call your landline provider and see what they suggest. And do the same for any other systems you have such as telecare.

I rely on the internet a lot, and knowing how long our powercuts can be a BBU wouldn't be enough so I may invest in a small UPS to keep my important devices going for longer.