

Home Power Troubleshooting FAQ

Q. My lights dim when my neighbor operates his power tools. Can PGE help?

The voltage going into your home constantly changes depending on electrical loads used by you and your neighbors. We strive to keep our voltage within 5 percent of the nominal voltage. The neighbor's power tools may cause your voltage to drop outside of the 5 percent range. If it does, we can make changes in our electrical system to help prevent the problem. Call our outage and repair line (numbers on front) for assistance.

Q. My light bulbs last only a few weeks. What should I do?

Are light bulbs burning out throughout the entire home or just in one socket? If bulbs are burning out quickly throughout the entire house, you may want to contact our outage and repair line.

Several factors determine how long a light bulb lasts. These include the voltage rating, the wattage, the manufacturer's rated life of a bulb, how often you use the bulb and unusual voltage conditions. Here are some ideas to save you the expense of constantly changing light bulbs:

Try LED bulbs. LEDs last up to 25 years and use up to 85% less energy, according to manufacturers' estimates. See our Lighting section for more information. Standard incandescent light bulbs are designed to last approximately 750 hours, which may mean only a few months.

Try bulbs rated for 130 volts instead of 120 volts. The voltage in your house may be somewhat higher than normal, which causes 120 volt bulbs to burn out quickly.

If your light bulb seems unusually bright, you may have a different problem. Call our outage and repair line to verify your voltage is in the acceptable range.

Q. Some of my appliances and electronics suddenly quit working while others are running fine. Should I call PGE or an electrician?

Occasionally, a circuit breaker or fuse "trips" in your electrical panel - try turning them off and back on, or turning them on if they are off. If that doesn't work, call the PGE repair line.

Q. On hot days, my air conditioning keeps turning off. What should I do?

Chances are your air conditioning equipment is not operating properly. Contact a repair technician to service it.

Q. My power went off, and when it was restored, my television (or my computer modem) no longer worked. What can I do to protect my equipment in the future?

A fault most likely occurred in your area and shut the power off. If the fault was near your home, it may have damaged your TV. Another possible cause could be a surge when the power was

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restored. In either case, a modest investment in surge protection can keep your electronics and appliances safe.

Q. The lights blinked while I was working on a project in my home office. My computer automatically rebooted and I lost my work. How can I prevent this in the future?

A fault in the system may have caused the lights to blink. Although faults occur for many reasons, such as lightning or a downed power line, PGE can do little to prevent them. Protect your computer data with an uninterruptible power supply (UPS). A UPS automatically provides power when there is a fault in the system, which prevents the loss of valuable data.

Q. One of my circuit breakers keeps tripping. The electrician that checked it found nothing wrong and suggested I contact PGE. Who do I call?

Circuit breakers trip for a couple of reasons. The circuit is overloaded, the circuit breaker is defective, or a fault has tripped the circuit. Have an electrician take a look first, as the most common causes are related to the home system. If an electrician can find a problem or advises you call PGE, call our outage and repair line.

Q. A tree fell and knocked down the line that comes right to my house. It also yanked the service mast away from my house and pulled the wiring loose. How fast can PGE make repairs?

Call our outage and repair line to report the problem. Our crews will quickly take care of the power lines. However, you'll also need to contact an electrician to repair the service mast and house wiring. Those items actually belong to you, and PGE is not authorized to make house-wiring repairs. Only a licensed electrical contractor can perform that type of work. See our list of PowerBack PGE-certified electrical contractors who are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Q. I recently started hearing a high-pitched noise when I listen to my radio. Can PGE look into this type of problem?

Many things can affect the AM channels of a radio. A light dimmer switch, a doorbell transformer, and fluorescent lights can all interfere with radio reception. Occasionally, when PGE equipment is degraded, it can produce noise.

Call our outage and repair line to report the problem. We'll get back to you quickly to help identify the source of the noise and a solution.

Q. I purchased a UPS and still experienced surge damage. How is this possible?

Most UPS devices have surge protection built into them. In some cases, however, a surge exceeds the rating of the device. A better approach to protecting your sensitive load is to install surge

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protection ahead of your UPS. A good surge protection device (SPD) protects your UPS and any equipment connected to your UPS from failures.

Q. I bought a SPD and still experienced surge damage. How could this happen?

Each SPD has limits on how much surge energy it can handle. Many inexpensive SPDs and UPS devices have low limits. Visit our surge protection page to learn about the right protection for your situation.

Q. If I have a panel-mounted surge protector, why would I need outlet protection?

Two reasons. First, a panel-mounted surge protector will not prevent surges from entering your house through phone, cable or digital satellite system lines. Second, electronics require a higher degree of surge protection than other devices. Outlet protectors offer tighter voltage clamping, eliminating all surge “noise” and providing cleaner power to devices plugged into them.

Q. I live in an old house and the surge protector I use indicates there is a wiring error. What can I do to fix this problem?

Generally, houses built before 1960 do not have a ground conductor included with their electrical outlets. In other words, there are two holes instead of three. Occasionally, people add outlets to their house so they can plug in three-prong cords, but they do not add the ground wire to the receptacle. This may be the wiring error the surge protector is indicating, or it may be indicating other wiring errors at the receptacle. An electrical contractor can help.

Q. I heat my home with gas, but want to connect a stationary generator to the electrical panel. How should I connect the generator to the electrical panel so I can operate my heat and a few other loads?

The National Electric Code requires that a transfer switch be installed if you want to power some of your house loads with a generator. You should get an electrical contractor to install it. And remember, for your safety and that of utility crews, never connect a portable generator to your home’s wiring – it can backfeed and start a fire or electrocute crews working on lines they think are de-energized.

Q. I recently added a heat pump to my house and now the lights dim when it comes on. What should I do?

The pump’s load may cause the voltage to drop too low. Call our outage and repair line to have someone check your service