

The First 3 Days: Settle In

This is the rule-of-threes water threshold: by roughly 72 hours, “we’ll figure out water” has to stop being an acceptable answer. By the 3-day mark, you should be executing a plan, not still reacting to the event.

A real rationing plan is active

Not just stored supplies sitting there, an actual known daily draw. Most households have never actually calculated what they need beyond the bare 1 gallon/person/day floor, and that floor assumes no laundry and no toilet flushing. See the Storing Water Correctly guide’s water-budget breakdown for what your specific household, especially if anyone’s pregnant, nursing, sick, or doing hard physical work, actually needs.

FIFO rotation tracking has started

On whatever you’re drawing down, so you’re not discovering three weeks in that half the stock quietly expired before you got to it.

Communication check-ins are scheduled, not ad hoc

With your out-of-area contact and nearby family, on an actual cadence rather than whenever someone happens to think of it.

If anyone is sick, isolation is actually in place

Not just discussed as a good idea. See Isolating a Sick Household Member for the actual setup: a dedicated space, dedicated dishes and towels, and a cleaning routine, since disease spreading through the whole household is a bigger risk at this point than almost anything else.

Reassess duration

Are utilities, roads, or outside help starting to return? This answer shapes the decision at the 14-day mark more than anything else that's happened so far.

If this is already resolving

Same branch as Part 2: if things are genuinely wrapping up, skip ahead to Recovery rather than working through the rest of this timeline for its own sake.

Next: the 14-day decision point

Once a real plan is actually running, move to Part 5: Extend or Stand Down.