

The First 3 Hours: Stabilize

This is the rule-of-threes shelter threshold: exposure becomes a real risk past roughly three hours without real shelter in a harsh environment. By this point, shelter and immediate safety need to be actually secured, not just assumed to still be holding from an hour ago.

Confirm your shelter is real, not provisional

If you sealed a room against smoke or a chemical release per the steps in Making It Safe, remember that only holds for about 2–3 hours before outside air seeps back in. Re-evaluate now rather than assuming it's still working; conditions and your own plan can both have changed since the first assessment.

Treat injuries beyond the initial check

The first hour was about finding out who's hurt. This is about actually cleaning and dressing wounds properly, not just noting them. See First Aid Basics for wound care, bleeding control, and when an injury needs more than a bandage.

Get warm if the temperature is working against you

Cold is its own hazard on the same clock as everything else here. If heat is out and it's cold enough to matter, picking and sealing one room and layering correctly isn't a Tier-2 problem, it's a today problem. See Staying Warm Without Power.

Confirm you actually have water and food on hand

Not a general sense that you probably have enough, an actual count, against the next three days specifically. This is also the point to make sure anything perishable gets eaten first rather than left to spoil unnoticed; see Food Safety After a Power Outage for the safe eating order if the power's out.

Confirm medication supply

For anyone on a regular prescription, check that what's on hand actually covers the near term, not just that a bottle exists somewhere in the house.

If this is already resolving

Not every event needs the full sequence below. If things are genuinely wrapping up already, roads clear, power's back, the immediate danger has passed, you can go straight to Recovery instead of working through the rest of this timeline. Most events don't resolve this fast, but some do.

Next: Take Inventory

Once shelter and injuries are handled, move to Part 3: The First 24 Hours.