



BIPT

FAQ on the power cuts planned for the winter 2018-2019

1. What is the role of BIPT in the context of power cuts?

BIPT is the regulator of the postal and telecommunications sectors. In this context, the Institute must ensure the security and continuity of the electronic communications infrastructure. Concerning the risks of electricity switch-off, this includes among other things:

- raising awareness amongst telecommunications operators and informing them;*
- assessing the impact;*
- ensuring the coordination between the telecommunications sector and the Crisis Centre.*

2. No electricity = no (tele)communications?

Today, about 25 major operators offering various telecommunications services are active in Belgium. As all of their networks are interconnected, they depend on each other.

In order to operate, they largely depend on the availability of electricity. Although they are not responsible for interruptions in the provision of electricity, operators have incorporated technical mechanisms in their networks to deal with such power cuts and to limit their impacts, and this on the offer of services to consumers as well as companies.

3. Tips

For an efficient use of the available resources (GSM batteries, spare batteries of the impacted antennas, etc.), we advise you to keep the non-urgent communications to a minimum during power cuts.

4. Will my fixed telephone lines still be functioning?

If you have a standard telephone line with a telephone device functioning without dedicated power supply, you will still be able to make calls for approximately 4 hours, from the start of the switch-off.

In most cases, the functioning of your line is directly related to the supply of electricity, be it for your modem as well as the line equipment of your operator. Without electricity, you will not be able to use your fixed telephone or other fixed communication services anymore.

If specific applications are linked to your fixed telephone line (alarm), we advise you to take the necessary security measures.

5. Will fixed Internet services, analogue television and digital television still be functioning?

These services directly depend on the supply of electricity and will remain unavailable during the switch-off. There are some exceptions for professional customers.

6. Will my mobile phone still be functioning?

In case of extended interruption in the supply of electricity, the functioning of the section of your operator's mobile network located in the impacted area will be disrupted.

In the area under the switch-off, your GSM will still be functioning for 1 to 2 hours (make sure that your GSM is charged) for telephony and SMSs. The possible difference in duration (1 to 2 hours) is explained by the network load and the type of installed equipment. The number of calls also influences the autonomy of the antenna.

Despite all the efforts to ensure access to the networks, access to the GSM network might be impossible after 1 to 2 hours, and this despite the fact that you are not disconnected from the power grid. This may be due to the fact that the GSM antenna is located in a disconnected area. The reverse is also possible: you might be able to continue to make mobile calls without difficulties.

Generally speaking, in case of electricity switch-off, we advise you to limit the use of your mobile phone to the very necessary communications, not to put an unnecessary strain on the backup batteries of your operator.

Furthermore, certain operators may interrupt the mobile data traffic (3G and 4G), and this to give priority to conventional mobile phone calls and thus emergency calls.

After the power is restored, manual interventions may be necessary on certain GSM antennas which suffered the effects of the switch-off. In specific cases, you might not be able to make mobile calls for a few minutes to a few hours after the power is restored.

7. Will my mobile Internet connection (3G/4G) still be functioning?

In the areas serviced by the mobile Internet base stations, this service will be available between 0 minute and 1 hour, depending on the operator's mechanisms.

Certain operators choose to make the backup battery available to telephony and emergency calls in priority. This is why 3G/4G will be shut down more quickly or immediately.

8. Will my connected objects still be functioning?

A connected object (e.g. your alarm system) will generally continue to function, but its communication (e.g. contacting the alarm centre) could be affected. If your connected object uses a fixed line, the answer to question 5 is applicable. If it is connected by means of a SIM card, the answers to questions 6 and 7 are applicable.

9. Can I still call the emergency services via GSM?

When the power supply of antennas is interrupted, they automatically switch to their backup battery. As long as the antenna of your operator is functioning, you can directly call the rescue services with your mobile phone.

If the power outage lasts for a long time, the backup batteries will run out of power and, inevitably, certain antennas will stop functioning.

Note that there can be antennas of other operators nearby your location that are still running. If you receive enough signal, you can call the emergency number 112. In that case, access to the emergency numbers 100 and 101 will not be guaranteed anymore.

Call the emergency numbers 112, 100 and 101 only if you need urgent assistance. If you call emergency numbers without valid reasons, the emergency call centres will not be able to take calls from people who really need help.

If it is no longer possible to make a call: please consult the general information disseminated by the authority or ask for help in your neighbourhood.

10. Can I still contact the emergency services with my fixed telephone?

As long as your fixed telephone functions (dial tone), you can still call the emergency services. However, the probability of being able to use your fixed line is very low.

11. My street is located outside an area under switch-off. In that case, will I be able to continue using my services as usual?

The power cut plan provides a good indication of the areas which will be under switch-off.

This being said,

In most cases, if you are not in a slice under switch-off, your phones should continue to function. However, in exceptional cases, some of your telecommunication services may be affected by a switch-off, even if you are not in the slice under switch-off.

11.1. Consequently, concerning fixed services, a network component that is necessary for the provision of services to certain users may be in a slice under switch-off. So, despite the fact that you are not in a switched-off slice, your fixed telecommunication services might be impacted.

11.2. In the same way, concerning mobile telephony, an antenna located in a switched-off slice may cover a piece of territory outside the slice. So, even if you are in a non-switched-off slice, the antenna that is the closest to your position might be in a switched-off slice and be impacted. Conversely, you could be in a switched-off slice but still be covered by an antenna outside of the slice and which thus operates without any problems.

12. What should I do with the cable modems, the routers, the xDSL and the set-top boxes during a power cut?

Experience shows that terminal equipment can be damaged when suddenly disconnected from/reconnected to the power grid. It is therefore advisable, when a power cut is announced, to switch off the devices, via the power button, and then to pull the plug(s).

When the power is restored: do not directly turn the devices back on, wait a moment.

13. What should I do when the power is restored?

After the power is restored, operators may have to execute manual interventions, which means that web browsing and calls may not be immediately available. All the terminal equipment must also reconnect to the network, which will take some time. In specific cases, you might not be able to make mobile calls for a few minutes to a few hours after the power is restored.

It is recommended to wait a few moments before connecting your terminal equipment to communicate.

The operators make the necessary efforts to restore the service. Do not immediately call the customer service.

14. What if I have other questions concerning my specific situation during a power cut?

The operators provide information on their websites or their service desks concerning the consequences of power cuts on telecommunication services.

It is preferable to consult information on the website first and, if it is still necessary, to contact the service desk of your telecommunication services provider.

15. Where can I find more information about the power cut plan?

Please consult the website of the [FPS Economy](#).

16. How will I be notified of the activation of the power cut plan?

This information will be communicated via the media. Additionally, if you have subscribed to [BE-Alert](#), you will be notified when a power cut is planned in your area.

17. *Are you entitled to compensation from your telecommunication provider if it is impossible to communicate?*

Operators generally decline any responsibility in their terms and conditions when the service interruption results from circumstances caused by third parties, as in the case of a power cut for example.

They make the necessary efforts to limit the impact on customers and to restore the service as soon as possible after the power cut.