FREE HOMEOWNER GUIDE

Half my house lost power: what's going on?

The simpler causes to check first

If half your house suddenly lost power but the other half still works, don't panic. This is a common electrical issue in Portland-area homes, and in many cases it can be fixed the same day.

Sometimes it is a tripped breaker that looks like it is still on, sitting slightly out of alignment in the middle position. Go to your panel, firmly turn the breaker fully OFF, then back ON. In many homes one GFCI outlet also controls several downstream outlets, so if bathroom, garage, or kitchen counter plugs are dead, press the RESET button on a nearby GFCI.

- [ ] Check the breaker panel for a breaker in the middle position
- [ ] Reset GFCI outlets in bathrooms, garage, exterior, and laundry areas
- [ ] If power restores and stays on, you're set; if it trips again, there's a deeper issue

More serious causes: a lost leg or loose neutral

Homes in the Portland area receive 240 volts split into two 120-volt legs. If one leg fails, half your breakers lose power, lights in certain rooms go out, some appliances work while others don't, and 240V appliances like a range or dryer may stop. This can be caused by a failed main breaker, a damaged bus bar, a loose service connection, or a utility supply issue.

A loose neutral connection is urgent. It can cause flickering lights, lights that are bright in one room and dim in another, electronics acting strangely, or a burning smell, and it can damage appliances quickly. If lights are unusually bright or dim, turn off major appliances and call for service. This is not DIY territory; working inside a panel can be dangerous.

Older panels and when to call

Many older Portland homes still have outdated panels like Federal Pacific, Zinsco, Pushmatic, or fuse panels. These can fail unpredictably and may not trip properly when needed. If your home was built before the 1990s and you're experiencing partial power loss, it may be time for a professional panel evaluation. It is safe to check breakers and GFCIs, but not safe to open your panel or test service connections.

- [ ] Half your panel has no power
- [ ] Breakers won't reset
- [ ] Lights flicker or change brightness
- [ ] You smell burning
- [ ] Your neighbors still have power but you don't

Frequently asked questions

Why did half my house lose power but no breakers tripped?

This often indicates a lost service leg or a loose connection inside the panel. Homes receive 240 volts split into two 120-volt legs, and if one leg fails, half the home goes dark without a breaker appearing to trip. It needs a professional diagnosis, since the panel and service connections should not be opened by a homeowner.

Can the utility cause half my house to lose power?

Yes, sometimes the issue is on the utility side, such as a failed connection at the service drop or meter. We can determine quickly whether the fault is in your panel or on the utility's equipment and coordinate with them if the problem is theirs.

Should I call the power company first?

If your neighbors have power and only half your house is affected, the problem is almost certainly on your side, so call an electrician first. If the whole neighborhood is out, it's a utility outage and the power company is the right first call.

Sources

1. Why is My Power Out?, Portland General Electric. https://portlandgeneral.com/outages-safety/why-is-my-power-out
2. Troubleshooting Home Power Problems, Portland General Electric. https://portlandgeneral.com/outages-safety/why-is-my-power-out/home-faqs

> **Need a licensed electrician in the Portland area?**
> Call Smiley Electric at (503) 484-7556 (Mon–Sat, 7am–5pm) or visit smileyelectric.net/contact. For sparks, smoke, a burning smell or a hot panel, turn off the power if it is safe and call right away.

Reviewed by Joshua Smiley, owner & master electrician, Smiley Electric. Last reviewed November 13, 2026. Online version: smileyelectric.net/help/half-house-lost-power/. General information, not a substitute for an on-site inspection.

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