Stay Warm, Stay Safe, Andrews County

A Crisis Media Campaign for a Winter Storm and Grid Emergency

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MMJ 1307: Mass Communication in Society

East Texas A&M University
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Hypothetical scenario created for MMJ 1307, Mass Communication in Society, East Texas A&M University. This is not an official statement or document of Andrews County, Texas, and does not reflect actual positions, events, or leadership of Andrews County.

Media Campaign Plan

1. The Crisis

My hypothetical crisis is an arctic ice storm that forces rolling power outages across Andrews County, Texas, where I live. I play the county's public information officer, leading the emergency communication effort.

2. Cause and Community

I chose this crisis because it already happened in real life. In February 2021, Winter Storm Uri left 69% of Texans without power at some point, for an average of 42 hours (Donald, 2021), and 246 Texans died (Svitek, 2022). Andrews County sits in the Permian Basin, where natural gas production dropped by almost 5 billion cubic feet per day during Uri as wells froze (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2024), so our community is tied directly to the fuel supply that failed. This crisis is also personal: I live with congestive heart failure, and about 10% of the storm's deaths came from existing illnesses that the storm made worse (Svitek, 2022). For people like me, losing heat is a medical emergency, which is why my plan puts medically dependent residents first.

3. Research and Analysis

Hypothermia caused close to two-thirds of the 246 deaths, and carbon monoxide poisoning caused another 8% (Svitek, 2022), a pattern the CDC also found when it tracked storm deaths in real time (Hanchey et al., 2023). That is why my campaign focuses on warmth, generator safety, and checking on neighbors. Research on boil water notices during Uri found that people followed safety instructions more often when messages made them feel able to act, and that power loss broke down normal communication channels (Day et al., 2024). Emergency managers during Uri were also left with insufficient information (Chand & McEntire, 2023), so my messages give specific actions, phone numbers, and set update times.

4. Objectives and Goals (SMART)

- Reach at least 80% of Andrews County households with warming-center and carbon monoxide messages within 48 hours of the first outage, measured by radio reach, social media shares, and 2-1-1 call volume.
- Contact every resident on the county's medical-needs list within 24 hours through welfare checks.
- Post two updates a day, at 8 a.m. and 6 p.m., until power is fully restored.
- Record zero carbon monoxide deaths in the county during the event.

5. Target Audience and Channels

My audience is all 18,610 residents of Andrews County (Data USA, 2024), with priority given to seniors, people who depend on medical equipment, and the 15.6% of residents living in poverty who may lack backup heat. Radio is my lead channel because battery and car radios still work when the power and internet go down. Social media graphics are built to be shared and screenshotted, because people pass along messages that are already published, which the course calls gatewatching (Poepsel, 2018). The press release goes to local news outlets, since local television news is trusted more than national news (Poepsel, 2018). Because 57.5% of the county is Hispanic or Latino (Data USA, 2024), a full rollout would partner with a Spanish-language radio station and bilingual volunteers to deliver translated versions. Following the textbook's crisis advice, every message stays truthful and transparent, avoids guessing, and tells people to buy only what they need, because the third-person effect leads people to stockpile when they expect everyone else to panic buy (Poepsel, 2018).

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ANDREWS COUNTY OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 15, 2027

Media Contact:
Cory Legendre, Public Information Officer
Andrews County Office of Emergency Management
(432) 555-0142 | media@acoem-texas.example

Andrews County Opens Warming Centers and Emergency Response as Ice Storm Brings Rolling Power Outages

Residents urged to stay off icy roads, never use generators or grills indoors, and check on elderly neighbors

ANDREWS, Texas (Feb. 15, 2027) – Andrews County has activated its emergency operations center after an arctic ice storm brought single-digit temperatures, freezing rain and rolling power outages across the county overnight.

The Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) ordered rolling outages across the state early Monday morning to protect the power grid. As of 10 a.m., Oncor reports that about 6,200 homes and businesses in Andrews County are without power.

ERCOT has not given a time for when rolling outages will end, and the county will not speculate. Restoration updates will be shared as soon as ERCOT and Oncor confirm them.

Roads across the county, including State Highway 115 and U.S. 385, are covered in ice. Residents should stay home unless travel is necessary.

What the county is doing now:

- Warming centers are open with heat, water, blankets and phone charging. Call 2-1-1 or visit 211texas.org for the nearest location and hours.
- The Sheriff's Office and volunteer fire departments are conducting welfare checks on residents who are elderly, disabled or dependent on medical equipment.
- County road crews are sanding bridges and main routes around the clock.
- The county is coordinating directly with ERCOT, Oncor and the Texas Division of Emergency Management.

What residents should do:

- Never run a generator inside your home, garage or basement, or within 20 feet of a window, door or vent.
- Never use a gas oven, charcoal grill or camp stove to heat your home.
- Carbon monoxide can kill before you feel sick. If you have a headache, dizziness, nausea or confusion, get outside and call 9-1-1.
- If you rely on oxygen, dialysis or other medical equipment, call 2-1-1 and press 4 to register for emergency assistance.
- Report outages to Oncor by texting OUT to 66267 or calling 1-888-313-4747.
- Check on elderly neighbors and anyone living alone.
- Please buy only what you need. Stores are being restocked, and supplies are on the way.

“We are going to be honest with you about what we know and what we don’t,” said Cory Legendre, Public Information Officer for Andrews County. “We don’t yet know when the rolling outages will end, but we do know how to keep each other safe until they do: stay warm, stay off the roads, and check on your neighbors.”

The county will post updates at 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. daily on its social media pages and through local radio until power is fully restored. For life-threatening emergencies, call 9-1-1.

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Social Media Content Plan

Three posts for the county's Facebook and Instagram pages, timed to the first week of the storm. Each graphic carries the key safety message on its own so it still works when it is screenshotted and shared.

Post 1 of 3 | Day 1: The storm hits

Andrews County Emergency Management
Monday, February 15, 2027 at 8:00 AM

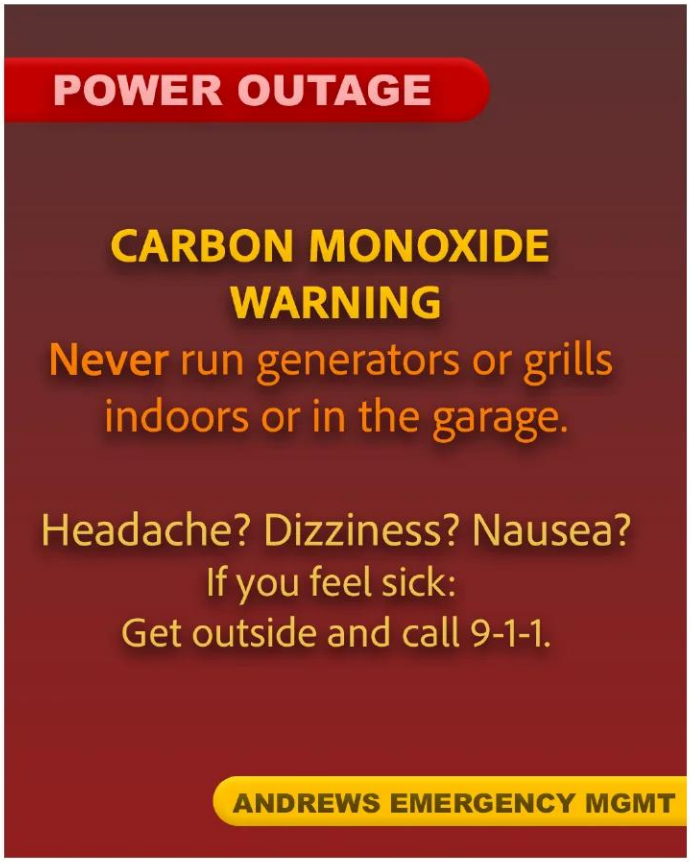
Andrews County, warming centers are open now with heat, water, blankets and phone charging. Call 2-1-1 or visit 211texas.org to find the one nearest you. Please check on elderly neighbors and anyone living alone, especially if their power is out. Roads are iced over, including SH 115 and US 385, so stay home unless you have to travel. We'll post updates here every day at 8 a.m. and 6 p.m.
#AndrewsCounty #TXwx #StayWarmTX



Post 2 of 3 | Day 2: Outages continue

Andrews County Emergency Management
Tuesday, February 16, 2027 at 8:00 AM

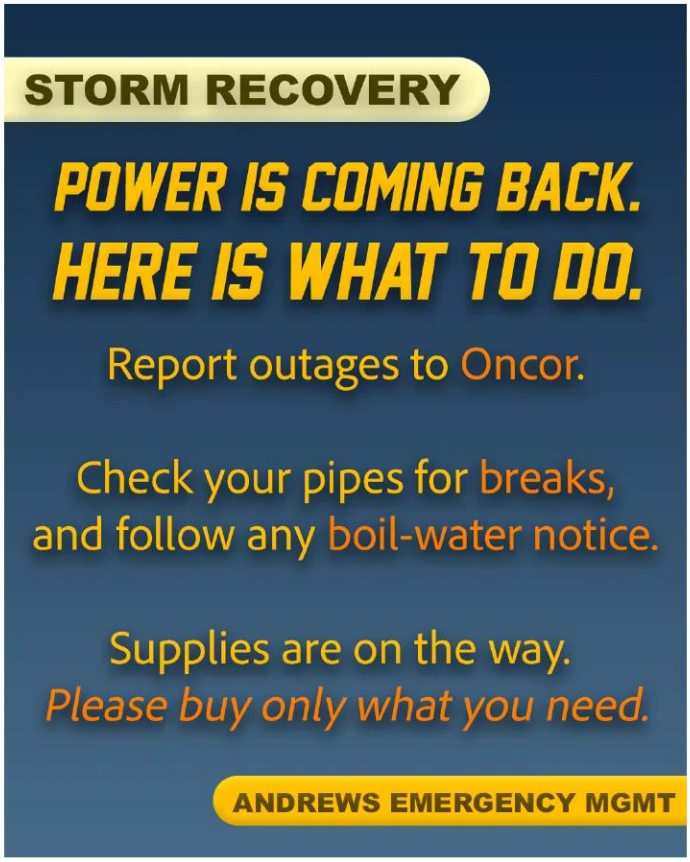
Carbon monoxide poisoning is one of the deadliest dangers during a power outage. Never run a generator inside your home, garage or basement, or within 20 feet of a window, door or vent. Never use a gas oven, charcoal grill or camp stove to heat your home. Warning signs include headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach and confusion. If you or anyone in your home feels this way, get outside into fresh air and call 9-1-1. Please share this with your family and neighbors.
#AndrewsCounty #COsafety #TXwx



Post 3 of 3 | Day 5: Recovery

Andrews County Emergency Management
Friday, February 19, 2027 at 6:00 PM

Power is being restored across Andrews County, and we want to thank every lineworker, road crew member and neighbor who stepped up this week. If your power is still out, report it to Oncor by texting OUT to 66267 or calling 1-888-313-4747. As temperatures rise, check your pipes for breaks and leaks, and shut off your main water valve if you find one. Stores are being restocked, so please buy only what you need so there is enough for everyone. If you need help with food, shelter or utility bills, call 2-1-1.
#AndrewsCounty #AndrewsStrong #TXwx



Radio Public Service Announcement

:60 Radio PSA, "Stay Warm, Stay Safe" | Andrews County Office of Emergency Management

Listen: https://voca.ro/19SKW8dQDa7P

Written for local radio because battery-powered and car radios keep working when power and internet service fail. Script as recorded:

> This is Cory Legendre with the Andrews County Office of Emergency Management.
>
> With the power out and temperatures in the single digits, a few safety steps can save a life tonight.
>
> Never run a generator inside your home, garage, or basement, or near a window or door.
>
> Never heat your home with a gas oven or a grill.
>
> Carbon monoxide has no smell, and it can kill before you feel sick.
>
> If you get a headache, feel dizzy, or feel sick to your stomach, get outside and call 9-1-1.
>
> If you need a warm place to go, call 2-1-1 for the nearest warming center.
>
> And please, check on your elderly neighbors and anyone living alone.
>
> Stay warm, stay off the roads, and look out for each other, Andrews County.

Length: 53 seconds (129 words). Recorded on Vocaroo.

References

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