

Food Safety during a Power Outage



During and after a prolonged power failure, the foods you keep in the refrigerator and freezer may become unsafe to eat. Bacteria can build up in potentially hazardous foods which may cause foodborne illness.

Should a power outage occur in a food premises, the owner/operator should contact SWPH immediately for further direction.

During a Power Outage:

Do not open the refrigerator/freezer, unless absolutely necessary, to maintain cold temperatures.

- A full freezer will keep food frozen for about 48 hours.
- A half full freezer will keep food frozen for about 24 hours.
- An unopened refrigerator will keep food cold for about 4 hours.

If you know that a power failure will last for a long period of time,

Private homes can consider the following options:

- Ask to use a friend or family member's refrigerator or freezer nearby who has power.
- If available, add ice to the refrigerator to keep the temperature cold for longer.

Food Premises can consider the following options:

- Contact a nearby inspected food premises that has power to request storing your potentially hazardous foods there until power is restored.
- Rent a reefer truck.
- ***Reminder that food premises must store food in inspected premises!***

After Power is Restored:

Discard any potentially hazardous food that has been at room temperature for two or more hours.

- Use a thermometer to verify that the internal temperature of potentially hazardous foods.
- Discard potentially hazardous foods above 4°C and have been at that temperature for longer than 2 hours.
- If unsure that the product has been above 4°C for longer than 2 hours, err on the side of caution and discard.

Keep in mind that food contaminated with bacteria does not necessarily smell bad or appear spoiled. **Follow the “when in doubt, throw it out” rule to ensure that the food is safe.**

If raw food has leaked during thawing, clean and disinfect the areas the food and/or its juices have touched. Do not reuse the cloths used for clean-up until they have been cleaned and disinfected.

For more information, please contact your Public Health Inspector
at Southwestern Public Health.