

Power Outage at a Food Establishment

The time to plan for an emergency is before one happens. These guidelines can help retail food businesses know what to do before, during, and after a power outage so they can protect their customers from foodborne disease and minimize product losses.

The biggest food safety concern is the condition of potentially hazardous food such as meats, eggs, dairy products, cooked vegetables, and cut melons. Potentially hazardous foods are usually moist, non-acidic, perishable foods and must be kept at temperatures below 41°F or above 135°F for safety.

Before a Power Outage

- Consider having an electrical generator available during a power outage. It will need to be big enough to operate the electrical equipment in your facility, and its installation and use must be coordinated with your power company for safety.
- Investigate potential sources for a refrigerated truck to be used during a power outage.
- Think about creating an “emergency menu” of foods that can be served with minimal preparation and without additional cooking.
- Have a phone that plugs directly into a phone jack and does not require any additional power.
- Keep a list of emergency phone numbers, including the number for your local health department.

When a Power Outage Occurs

- Keep track of the time the outage begins.
- Stop using gas or solid fuel cooking and heating equipment if the exhaust hood and make-up air systems stop working. Using this equipment without proper ventilation can lead to a dangerous build up of toxic fumes that may cause injury or death.
- Throw away any foods that are in the process of being cooked but have not yet reached their final cooking temperature.

Note: A power outage of 2 hours or less is not considered hazardous to food that was being held under safe conditions when the outage began.

Actions that can keep food safe for several hours:

Cold Potentially Hazardous Foods

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- If practical, group packages of cold food together. Keep raw meats away from other kinds of food.
- Cover any open display refrigerators and freezers, especially vertical displays.
- Surround food with ice.

Caution: If you use dry ice to cool food, it may cause an unsafe build-up of carbon dioxide in enclosed spaces.

Hot Potentially Hazardous Foods

- Don't put hot food in refrigerators or freezers.
- Use canned chafing dish fuel under food on electric steam tables to help keep potentially hazardous food over 135°F.

Stop preparing food if:

- Food cannot be kept at safe temperatures.
- There is no hot water.
- There is not enough water pressure.
- You cannot wash, rinse, and sanitize utensils properly.
- There is not enough light for employees to work safely.

After Power is Restored

- Check the internal temperature of all hot and cold potentially hazardous food.
- Decide to either keep or throw away potentially hazardous food, as shown in the tables below.
- If cold foods were grouped together to keep them cold, space them out again so they will cool more quickly.

What to do with Potentially Hazardous Food:

Cold Foods			
Hours Power is Out	Cold Food Temperature		
	45°F or below	46°F to 50°F	51°F or above
0-2	OK	OK	OK
2-4	OK	OK	X
More than 4	OK	X	X

OK = Food may be sold, as long as it was 41°F or less when the power went out. Immediately cool food to 41°F or less.

X = Food may be unsafe and may not be sold.

Hot Foods		
Hours Power is Out	Hot Food Temperature	
	130°F or above	129°F or below
0-2	OK	OK
2-4	OK	X
More than 4	X	X

OK = Food may be sold, as long as it was 135° or more when the power went out. Immediately reheat to at least 165°F. After reheating, hold at 135°F or more, or immediately cool to 41°F or less.

X = Food may be unsafe and may not be sold.

Reopening

If you voluntarily closed your facility, the following conditions should be verified before you resume food preparation and/or sale of potentially hazardous food:

- All unsafe potentially hazardous food (according to the charts above) has been discarded. If there are any questions about the safety of specific foods, contact your local health department.
- Hot and cold potable running water is available for handwashing and dishwashing.
- All equipment and facilities are operating properly, including: lighting, refrigeration, hot holding, ventilation, and toilet facilities.

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- Refrigerators are 41°F or less.
- Electricity and gas services have been restored.
- All circuit breakers have been properly reset as needed.

Note: If your facility was closed by the local health department, it must remain closed until that agency gives you official approval to reopen.

Disposal of Food

- When in doubt, throw it out!
- If food must be thrown away, document the type and amount of food and the reason for disposal, so that you can provide the information to regulators and your insurance company.
- Small amounts of food to be thrown away can be treated with a cleaning product (such as bleach) so that they will not be eaten and placed in the outside garbage bin.
- To throw away large amounts of food, contact your garbage disposal company or your local landfill operator for disposal instructions.
- If you have questions about the safety of specific foods, contact your local health department.