

Keeping Food Safe During an Emergency

(Source: United States Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service)

Did you know that a flood, fire, national disaster, or the loss of power from high winds, snow, or ice could jeopardize the safety of your food? Knowing how to determine if food is safe and how to keep food safe will help minimize the potential loss of food and reduce the risk of food-borne illness. This fact sheet will help you make the right decisions for keeping your family safe during an emergency.

ABCD's of Keeping Food Safe in an Emergency

Always keep meat, poultry, fish, and eggs refrigerated at or below 40 °F and frozen food at or below 0 °F. This may be difficult when the power is out.

Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature. The refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) if the door remains closed. Obtain dry or block ice to keep your refrigerator as cold as possible if the power is going to be out for a prolonged period of time. Fifty pounds of dry ice should hold an 18-cubic foot full freezer for 2 days. Plan ahead and know where dry ice and block ice can be purchased.

Be prepared for an emergency...

... by having items on hand that don't require refrigeration and can be eaten cold or heated on the outdoor grill. Shelf-stable food, boxed or canned milk, water, and canned goods should be part of a planned emergency food supply. Make sure you have ready-to-use baby formula for infants and pet food. Remember to use these items and replace them from time to time. Be sure to keep a hand-held can opener for an emergency.

Consider what you can do ahead of time to store your food safely in an emer-

gency. If you live in a location that could be affected by a flood, plan your food storage on shelves that will be safely out of the way of contaminated water. Coolers are a great help for keeping food cold if the power will be out for more than 4 hours—have a couple on hand along with frozen gel packs. When your freezer is not full, keep items close together—this helps the food stay cold longer.

Digital, dial, or instant-read food thermometers and appliance thermometers will help you know if the food is at safe temperatures. Keep appliance thermometers in the refrigerator and freezer at all times. When the power is out, an appliance thermometer will always indicate the temperature in the refrigerator and freezer no matter how long the power has been out. The refrigerator temperature should be 40 °F or below; the freezer, 0 °F or lower. If you're not sure a particular food is cold enough, take its temperature with a food thermometer.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. *A snowstorm knocked down the power lines, can I put the food from the refrigerator and freezer out in the snow?*

A. No, frozen food can thaw if it is exposed to the sun's rays even when the temperature is very cold. Refrigerated food may become too warm and food-borne bacteria could grow. The outside temperature could vary hour by hour and the temperature outside will not protect refrigerated and frozen food. Additionally, perishable items could be exposed to unsanitary conditions or to animals. Animals may harbor bacteria or disease; never consume food that has come in contact with an animal. Rather than putting the food outside, consider taking advantage of the cold temperatures by making ice. Fill buckets, empty milk cartons or cans with water and leave them outside to freeze. Then put

the homemade ice in your refrigerator, freezer, or coolers.

Q. *Some of my food in the freezer started to thaw or had thawed when the power came back on. Is the food safe? How long will the food in the refrigerator be safe with the power off?*

A. Never taste food to determine its safety! You will have to evaluate each item separately. If an appliance thermometer was kept in the freezer, read the temperature when the power comes back on. If the appliance thermometer stored in the freezer reads 40 °F or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen. If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine the safety. Remember you can't rely on appearance or odor. If the food still contains ice crystals or is 40 °F or below, it is safe to refreeze. Refrigerated food should be safe as long as power is out no more than 4 hours. Keep the door closed as much as possible. Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and leftovers) that have been above 40 °F for 2 hours.

Q. *May I refreeze the food in the freezer if it thawed or partially thawed?*

A. Yes, the food may be safely refrozen if the food still contains ice crystals or is at 40 °F or below. You will have to evaluate each item separately. Be sure to discard any items in either the freezer or the refrigerator that have come into contact with raw meat juices. Partial thawing and refreezing may reduce the quality of some food, but the food will remain safe to eat.

Refer to the charts on the following page for guidelines on when to throw food out after an outage. For more information visit: http://www.fsis.usda.gov/fact_sheets/keeping_food_Safe_during_an_emergency/index.asp.

What To Do if An Outage Occurs

1. Check your circuit breakers or fuses in your fuse box to make sure none are tripped or blown.
2. See if your neighbors have power.
3. Call REA Energy's outage number at 724/463-7273 or 1-800-332-7273, and our automated phone system will automatically record your name, account number, location and the time

you called in. If you choose to leave a message, stay on the line and your message will be recorded for our dispatcher's use. With the outage reporting system it is not necessary to call the system and/or office phone multiple times.

4. If your power is restored and goes out again, call our office to report the problem again, we

may think that the problem was fixed the first time.

5. Most importantly, be patient. If the outage occurs during a storm, many people are trying to call at the same time. After reaching us, please don't continue to call, we need the phone lines available to hear from everyone who has an outage.

Keeping Food Safe During an Emergency

Refrigerator Foods

| FOOD | Held above 40 °F for over 2 hours |
|---|--|
| Raw or leftover cooked meat, poultry, fish, or seafood; soy meat substitutes | Discard |
| Thawing meat or poultry | Discard |
| Meat, tuna, shrimp, chicken, or egg salad | Discard |
| Gravy, stuffing, broth | Discard |
| Lunchmeats, hot dogs, bacon, sausage, dried beef | Discard |
| Pizza – with any topping | Discard |
| Canned hams labeled “Keep Refrigerated” | Discard |
| Canned meats and fish, opened | Discard |
| Soft Cheeses: blue/bleu, Roquefort, Brie, Camembert, cottage, cream, Edam, Monterey Jack, ricotta, mozzarella, Muenster, Neufchatel, queso blanco, queso fresco | Discard |
| Hard Cheeses: Cheddar, Colby, Swiss, Parmesan, provolone, Romano | Safe |
| Processed Cheeses | Safe |
| Shredded Cheeses | Discard |
| Low-fat Cheeses | Discard |
| Grated Parmesan, Romano, or combo (can or jar) | Safe |
| Milk, cream, sour cream, buttermilk, evaporated milk, yogurt, eggnog, soy milk | Discard |
| Butter, margarine | Safe |
| Baby formula, opened | Discard |
| Fresh eggs, hard-cooked in shell, egg dishes & products | Discard |
| Custards and puddings | Discard |
| Casseroles, Soups, Stews | Discard |
| Fresh fruits, cut | Discard |
| Fruit juices, opened | Safe |
| Canned fruits, opened | Safe |
| Fresh fruits, coconut, raisins, dried fruits, candied fruits, dates | Safe |
| Opened mayonnaise, tartar sauce, horseradish | Discard if above 50 °F for over 8 hrs. |
| Peanut butter | Safe |
| Jelly, relish, taco sauce, mustard, catsup, olives, pickles | Safe |
| Worcestershire, soy, barbecue, Hoisin sauces | Safe |
| Fish sauces (oyster sauce) | Discard |
| Opened vinegar-based dressings | Safe |
| Opened creamy-based dressings | Discard |
| Spaghetti sauce, opened jar | Discard |
| Bread, rolls, cakes, muffins, quick breads, tortillas | Safe |
| Refrigerator biscuits, rolls, cookie dough | Discard |
| Cooked pasta, rice, potatoes | Discard |
| Pasta salads with mayonnaise or vinaigrette | Discard |
| Fresh pasta | Discard |
| Cheesecake | Discard |
| Breakfast foods –waffles, pancakes, bagels | Safe |
| Pastries, cream filled | Discard |
| Pies – custard, cheese filled, or chiffon; quiche | Discard |
| Pies, fruit | Safe |

Refrigerator Foods

| FOOD | Held above 40 °F for over 2 hours |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Fresh mushrooms, herbs, spices | Safe |
| Greens, pre-cut, pre-washed, packaged | Discard |
| Vegetables, raw | Safe |
| Vegetables, cooked; tofu | Discard |
| Vegetable juice, opened | Discard |
| Baked potatoes | Discard |
| Commercial garlic in oil | Discard |
| Potato Salad | Discard |

Frozen Foods

| FOOD | Contains ice crystals & feels cold as refrigerated | Thawed. Above 40 °F for over 2 hours |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| Beef, veal, lamb, pork, and ground meats | Refreeze | Discard |
| Poultry and ground poultry | Refreeze | Discard |
| Variety meats (liver, kidney, heart, chitterlings) | Refreeze | Discard |
| Casseroles, stews, soups | Refreeze | Discard |
| Fish, shellfish, breaded seafood products | Refreeze | Discard |
| Milk | Refreeze | Discard |
| Eggs (out of shell), egg products | Refreeze | Discard |
| Ice cream, frozen yogurt | Discard | Discard |
| Cheese (soft & semi-soft) | Refreeze | Discard |
| Hard cheeses | Refreeze | Refreeze |
| Shredded cheeses | Refreeze | Discard |
| Casseroles containing milk, cream, eggs, soft cheeses | Refreeze | Discard |
| Cheesecake | Refreeze | Discard |
| Fruit Juices | Refreeze | Refreeze |
| Fruit-Home/commercially packaged | Refreeze | Refreeze |
| Vegetable Juices | Refreeze | Discard after 6 hours. |
| Vegetables-Home/ commercially packaged/blanched | Refreeze | Discard after 6 hours. |
| Breads, rolls, muffins, cakes (w/o custard fillings) | Refreeze | Refreeze |
| Cakes, pies, pastries with custard or cheese filling | Refreeze | Discard |
| Pie crusts, commercial and homemade bread dough | Refreeze | Refreeze |
| Casseroles–pasta, rice base | Refreeze | Discard |
| Flour, cornmeal, nuts | Refreeze | Refreeze |
| Waffles, pancakes, bagels | Refreeze | Refreeze |
| Frozen meal, entree, specialty items | Refreeze | Discard |