



Food Safety During a Power Outage

- I. **Do two things immediately:**
 - a. Write down the time the power went off.
 - b. Check food temperatures with a thermometer and write them down.
- II. **Keep temperature records while the power is out.**
 - a. Check cold food every 2 hours for each unit.
 - b. Write down the times and temperatures.
- III. **For food being held cold (such as in a refrigerator at 41° F or below):**
 - a. Write down the time when food rises above 41° F.
 - b. Discard all cold food that has been above 41° F for more than 4 hours.
- IV. **For frozen foods that thaw out:** If thawed food does not exceed 41° F for more than four hours, it may be refrozen. (However, refreezing may make some foods watery or mushy.)
- V. **To keep cold food cold longer:**
 - a. Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature (except while checking temperatures every two hours).
 - b. Cover open units with a tarp.
 - c. Don't add hot food to units.
 - d. Group chilled foods together to reduce warming.
 - e. A closed refrigerator can keep food cold for up to four hours; a closed freezer for up to two days. A half-filled freezer will warm up twice as fast as a full one.
- VI. **Recovery when the power returns:**
 - a. Review temperature records.
 - b. Discard food as required (see #7 below).
 - c. Reset all breakers, equipment, etc.
- VII. **Discard or salvage:**
 - a. Refrigerated or frozen food should be discarded if: 1) Above 41° F for four hours or more, 2) Frozen and then thawed for four or more hours, or 3) Deteriorated in quality or has an unusual appearance, color, or odor.
 - b. Potentially Hazardous Food (PHF) must be discarded if it has been in the "Temperature Danger Zone" (41° F-135° F) for more than 4 hours. PHFs include: 1) Animal food that is raw or heat-treated: Ground beef, cooked roast beef, veal, lamb, poultry, fish, seafood, luncheon meats, hot dogs, hams, etc.; 2) Plant foods that are heat-treated or consist of raw seed sprouts: Cooked pasta, rice, peas, corn, beans, etc.; 3) Cut melons: Watermelon, musk or honeydew melons; 4) Cut leafy greens: Cut, shredded, sliced, chopped or torn iceberg lettuce, romaine lettuce, leaf lettuce, escarole, endive, spring mix, spinach, cabbage, kale, arugula, chard, etc.; 5) Cut tomatoes or mixtures of cut tomatoes; 6) Garlic-in-oil mixtures; 7) Eggs and dairy products: a) Eggs or egg products, ice cream, yogurt, b) Milk, cream, buttermilk, cream-based foods or soups, c) Soft cheeses such as cream, ricotta, brie, etc.; 8) Desserts: Pies, cakes, and pastries containing custard cheese, chiffon, meringue or

pumpkin; 9) Soups, stews, casseroles or similar dishes containing meats, pasta, rice, eggs, or cheeses

- c. Partially cooked food should be discarded if without power for more than one hour.
- d. Frozen foods, if stored in a sealed walk-in or cabinet and where ambient temperature has remained below 41° F, may be salvaged.

VIII. Remember:

- a. Cancel incoming food supply shipments.
- b. Never taste food to determine its safety.
- c. When in doubt, throw it out.

References: Emergency Handbook for Food Managers, Twin Cities Metro Advanced Practice Centers (APC), supported by funding from the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), First printing, September 2005

A Consumer's Guide to Food Safety: Severe Storms and Hurricanes

Source URL: <https://dia.iowa.gov/food/food-safety-during-power-outage>