

# Power Outage/Food Spoilage

Emergency planning should be completed before the emergency happens. The information provided in this bulletin can help to lessen the size of product loss/spoilage as well as protect customers from foodborne disease.

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 You Lose Power

- Generators can be expensive, however if you have experienced several outages this may be worth considering. 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. Your food supply company or local warehouse may have reefer trailers you can use to preserve food.
- Keep a landline phone that plugs directly into a phone jack and does not require any additional power. Cordless phones require power and will not work.
- Keep a list of emergency phone numbers, including the number for your local health department, food warehouse, utility company, dry ice vendor, refrigerated truck leasing company and any other number you may need. This list should be posted in a known location for quick reference.
- Keep chafing dishes and fuel cans on hand to maintain prepared foods for short amounts of time.
- Maintain a flash light and battery powered portable lighting in each department area. Emergency lights are supposed to activate but may not due to battery or light bulb issues.
- Develop a plan of action for all employees and educate them on the plan. A plan should also be developed to help evacuate shoppers from the building.

## The Power is Out!

- Notify your utility company of the power outage immediately. Important so that they can start repairs as soon as possible.
- Inform vendors and warehouse about power outage and halt any shipments that are sensitive to temperature.
- Shut off all compressors and related equipment and when power is restored turn them back on individually to avoid tripping breakers.
- Make sure all freezer and cooler doors are closed and remain closed until power is restored.

- Keep track of the time the outage begins, this will be important when filing claims or determining the viability of food that remains.
- Do not continue cooking or operating solid fuel equipment or heater without a working exhaust. A dangerous buildup of carbon monoxide can occur.
- Any food items that were in the process of being prepared should be thrown out if they did not reach their final temperature.
- A power loss of 2 hours or less is not considered hazardous to food that was being held under safe conditions when the outage began.

## **Cold Foods**

- Do not open refrigerator or freezer doors unless necessary. The more they are opened the quicker the temperature will rise.
- 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. Bags of potato chips are a good layer of protection.
- Surround food with ice wherever possible. Direct contact with ice can also damage some foods.
- Be careful when using dry ice to cool food, it may cause an unsafe build-up of carbon dioxide in enclosed spaces.
- Generally outside temperatures are not cold enough to put food outside, however in certain situations this may be a last option. Remember to monitor the temperature to maintain food safety.

## **Hot Foods**

- Do not put hot food in refrigerators or freezers, this can create condensation and raise the temperature.
- Use canned chafing dish fuel under food on electric steam tables or in chafing dishes to help keep potentially hazardous food over 135°F. Remember to monitor the fuel as it is an open flame.
- Resist the urge to use gas powered equipment to maintain temperatures, if the exhaust system is without power, turn it OFF!

## **Stop preparing food if:**

- Food cannot be kept at safe temperatures.
- There is no hot water. If you have electric water heaters or a water pump this will happen quickly.
- There is not enough water pressure.
- You cannot wash, rinse, and sanitize utensils properly.

- There is not enough light for employees to work safely. Even with portable lighting the safety of employees must come first.

## After Power is Restored

- Check the internal temperature of all hot and cold potentially hazardous food throughout the outage and dispose of any items that fall out of range shown on 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 whent 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.

## Power is On!

When operations are resumed, be sure you are in compliance with local health department requirements. All food hot or cold must be deemed safe for consumption based on your temperature monitoring.

- All unsafe potentially hazardous food (according to the charts above) has been discarded.
- Hot and cold potable running water is available for handwashing and dishwashing.
- All equipment and facilities are operating properly, including: lighting, refrigeration, and hot holding, ventilation, and toilet facilities.
- Refrigerators are 41°F or less.
- Electricity and gas services have been restored.
- All circuit breakers have been properly reset as needed.
- **If your facility was closed by the local health department, it must remain closed until that agency gives you official approval to reopen.**

## Spoilage

- Any food that is considered borderline should be discarded.
- If food must be disposed of, **document and photograph the type and amount of food** and the reason for disposal, this information is important for insurance purposes.
- To throw away large amounts of food, contact your garbage disposal company or your local landfill operator for disposal instructions.
- For specific food safety questions, contact your local health department.
- Not all refrigerated foods are required to be kept cold. Check all labels before throwing items out or trying to find areas to keep them cold. Many items like Kraft American Singles, certain butters or dips are refrigerated in stores but it is not required.

Content Source: Washington Department of Health, Avant Supermarket Group.