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**Power Outages in Food Establishments**

**Plan for an emergency before it happens.**

What should you do before, during and after a power outage? The tips below can help retail food businesses protect customers from foodborne illness and save their inventory.

Store potentially hazardous foods below 41° F or above 135° F. These foods include:

* Meats, eggs and dairy products.
* Vegetables, cut leafy greens, tomatoes and cut melon.
* Moist, non-acidic and perishable (cooked onions, green beans, pasta, rice).

**Before a power outage:**

* Consider buying an electrical generator to use in case you lose power.
* Learn about the availability of refrigerated trucks to use during extended power outages.
* Have a phone that plugs into a jack and does not need power.
* Keep a list of emergency phone numbers.

**During a power outage:**

* Keep track of the time the outage begins.
* Do not use gas or solid fuel (i.e., charcoal, wood, canned chafing dish fuel), cooking and heating equipment without proper ventilation. These fuels are dangerous and may cause injury or death.
* Throw away any food that has not yet reached final cooking temperature.

**Cold food:**

* Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
* If practical, group packages of cold food together. Keep raw meat away from other food.
* Cover any open display refrigerators and freezers, especially vertical displays.
* Surround food with ice.
* Note: If you use dry ice to cool food, an unsafe build-up of carbon dioxide may happen in enclosed spaces.

**Hot food:**

* Do not put hot food in refrigerators or freezers.
* Use canned chafing dish fuel under food on electric steam tables to help keep potentially hazardous food at 135°F.

**Stop preparing food if:**

* You cannot maintain food at safe temperatures.
* You lose hot water.
* Water pressure drops below normal.
* You cannot wash, rinse and sanitize utensils.
* You lose light for employees to work safely.

**After a power outage.**

Verify the following conditions before you resume food preparation or reopen for sale:

* Check the internal temperature of all hot and cold potentially hazardous food.
* Discard all unsafe potentially hazardous food. See tables below.
* Space out cold food in the refrigerator to cool faster.
* Have hot and cold running water.
* All equipment and facilities are operating.
* All utilities are working.
* Health Department has given you approval to reopen if the Department closed your facility.

**Potentially hazardous food.**

**Cold foods**

| **Hours power is out** | **Food Temperature** | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **45°F or below** | **46°F to 50°F** | **51°F or above** |
| 0-2 hours | OK | OK | OK |
| 2-4 hours | OK | OK | X |
| More than 4 hours | OK | X | X |

* **OK**= Food may be sold, as long as it was 41°F or below when the power went out. Immediately cool food to 41°F or below.
* **X**= Food may be unsafe and may not be sold.

**Hot foods**

| **Hours power is out** | **Food Temperature** | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **130°F or above** | **129°F or below** |  |
| 0-2 hours | OK | OK |  |
| 2-4 hours | OK | X |  |
| More than 4 hours | X | X |  |

* **OK**= Food may be sold, as long as it was 135°F or above when the power went out. Immediately reheat food to 165°F or above. After reheating, hold at 135°F or above or rapidly cool to 41°F or below.
* **X**= Food may be unsafe and may not be sold.

See the following page for the above information: [Washington State Department of Health Guidelines.](https://doh.wa.gov/emergencies/be-prepared-be-safe/power-outages/food-establishment-power-outage)

**Disposal of food:**

* When in doubt, throw it out!
* Document the type and amount of food and the reason for disposal. You may need to provide the information to regulators and your insurance company.
* For large amounts of food, contact your garbage company for instructions.

**Resources**

* [Power Outage in Food Establishments Handout](https://tpchd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Power-Outages-Food-Establishments.pdf)
  + Also available in [Spanish](https://tpchd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Power-Outages-Food-Establishments-Spanish.pdf), [Russian](https://tpchd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Power-Outages-Food-Establishments-Russian.pdf), [Korean](https://tpchd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Power-Outages-Food-Establishments-Korean.pdf), [Tagalog](https://tpchd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Power-Outages-Food-Establishments-Tagalog.pdf) and [Vietnamese](https://tpchd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Power-Outages-Food-Establishments-Vietnamese.pdf).
* [Washington State Department of Health: Emergency preparedness and response information.](https://doh.wa.gov/emergencies/be-prepared-be-safe)
* [Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department: Emergency preparedness and response information](https://tpchd.org/healthy-places/emergency-preparedness/).

**Questions?**

Contact the Food and Community Safety program at [food@tpchd.org](mailto:food@tpchd.org) or (253) 649-1417.