

FOOD SAFETY DURING UTILITY OUTAGES

Power outages are frustrating and troublesome, especially when they are prolonged. Being prepared can help. If a power outage is 2 hours or less, you need not be concerned. However, perishable foods should not be kept above 40 degrees for more than 2 hours. By planning ahead, you can save your perishables.

What do I need?

- One or more coolers to store food- inexpensive Styrofoam coolers are sufficient
- Shelf-stable foods, such as canned goods and powdered or boxed milk that can be eaten cold or heated on a grill
- A digital quick-response thermometer to quickly check the internal temperatures of food for doneness and safety

What to do

- Do not open the refrigerator or freezer. An unopened refrigerator will keep foods cold enough for 2-4 hours.
- If it looks like the power outage will be for more than 2-4 hours, pack refrigerated milk, dairy products, meats, fish, poultry and eggs into your cooler surrounded by ice.
- A freezer that is half full will hold food at the correct temperature for up to 24 hours and a full freezer for 48 hours.
- If it looks like the power outage will be prolonged, prepare a cooler with ice for your freezer items.

What if I go to bed and the power is still not on?

- Before you go to bed, pack your perishables into your coolers.
- Leave a bedroom light switched on to wake when the power returns and you can check the condition of your foods in the freezer.

What if the power goes out while I'm at work or out of the house and it has been more than a few hours before I get home?

- Try to determine how long the power has been out.
- Check the internal temperature of the food in your refrigerator with a thermometer.
- If the internal temperature is above 40 degrees, it is best to throw it out.

What if the power goes out and comes back on while I am out?

- If your freezer is fairly full and you know it was not longer than 24 hours, the food should be OK. There will be loss of quality with refreezing, but the food will be safe. If the refrigerator was out for more than 2-4 hours, discard the perishables.

What should be discarded?

- Check temperatures when power returns
- If the food in the freezer has ice crystals and is not above 40 degrees you can refreeze.
- Perishable foods in the refrigerator should not be above 40 degrees F. for more than two hours.
- Use the chart below to check for specific items.

Prepared by Giant Food, Inc., Landover, Maryland, June 1999. Used with permission. Original content adapted from "Help, Power Outage!" Food News for Consumers, Summer 1989, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service. American Red Cross September 1999

Frozen Foods		
	Still Contains Ice Crystals. Not Above 40° F	Thawed, Held Above 40° F For Over 2 Hours
Meat and Mixed Dishes:		
Beef, veal, lamb, pork, poultry, ground meat and poultry	Refreeze	Discard
Casseroles with meat, pasta, rice, egg or cheese base, stews, soups, convenience foods, pizza	Refreeze	Discard
Fish, shellfish, breaded seafood products	Refreeze	Discard
Dairy:	Still Contains Ice Crystals. Not Above 40° F	Thawed, Held Above 40° F For Over 2 Hours
Milk	Refreeze	Discard
Eggs (out of shell) egg products	Refreeze	Discard
Ice cream, frozen yogurt	Discard	Discard
Cheese (soft and semi soft) cream cheese ricotta	Refreeze	Discard
Hard cheese (cheddar Swiss parmesan)	Refreeze	Refreeze
Sauces, Spreads, Jams:	Food Still Cold, Held At 40° F Or Above Under 2 Hours	Held Above 40° F For Over 2 Hours
Mayonnaise, tartar sauce, horseradish	Keep	Discard
Opened salad dressing, jelly, relish, taco and barbeque sauce, mustard, catsup olives	Keep	Keep

FOOD SAFETY DURING UTILITY OUTAGES

Fruits and Vegetables:	Still Contains Ice Crystals. Not Above 40° F	Thawed, Held Above 40° F For Over 2 Hours
Fruit Juices	Refreeze	Refreeze. Discard if mold, yeasty smell or sliminess develops.
Home or commercially packaged fruit	Refreeze	Refreeze. Discard if mold, yeasty smell or sliminess develops.
Vegetable Juices	Refreeze	Discard if above 50° for over 8 hours.
Home or commercially packaged or blanched vegetables	Refreeze	Discard if above 50° for over 8 hours.
Baked Goods Baking Ingredients:	Still Contains Ice Crystals. Not Above 40° F	Thawed, Held Above 40° F For Over 2 Hours
Fruit Juices	Refreeze	Refreeze
Flour, cornmeal, nuts	Refreeze	Refreeze
Pie Crusts, Breads, rolls, muffins, cakes (no custard fillings)	Refreeze	Discard if above 50° for over 8 hours.
Cakes, pies, pastries with custard or cheese filling, cheesecake	Refreeze	Discard
Commercial and homemade bread dough	Refreeze	Refreeze
Dairy/Eggs/Cheese:	Food Still Cold, Held At 40° F Or Above Under 2 Hours	Held Above 40° F For Over 2 Hours
Milk, cream, sour cream buttermilk evaporated milk yogurt	Keep	Discard
Butter, margarine	Keep	Keep
Baby Formula, opened	Keep	Discard
Eggs, egg dishes, custards puddings	Keep	Discard
Hard & processed cheeses	Keep	Keep
Soft cheeses, cottage cheese	Keep	Discard

Fruits & Vegetables:	Food Still Cold, Held At 40° F Or Above Under 2 Hours	Held Above 40° F For Over 2 Hours
Fruit juices, opened; Canned fruits, opened; Fresh fruits	Keep	Keep
Vegetables, cooked; Vegetable juice opened	Keep	Discard after 6 hours
Baked potatoes	Keep	Discard
Fresh mushrooms, herbs spices	Keep	Keep
Meat, Poultry, Seafood:	Food Still Cold, Held At 40° F Or Above Under 2 Hours	Held Above 40° F For Over 2 Hours
Fresh or leftover meat, poultry, fish, or seafood	Keep	Discard
Lunchmeats, hot dogs, bacon, sausage, dried beef	Keep	Discard
Canned meats NOT labeled "Keep Refrigerated" but refrigerated after opening	Keep	Discard
Canned hams labeled "Keep Refrigerated"	Keep	Discard
Mixed Dishes, Side Dishes:	Food Still Cold, Held At 40° F Or Above Under 2 Hours	Held Above 40° F For Over 2 Hours
Casseroles, soups, stews, pizza with meat	Keep	Discard
Meat, tuna, shrimp, chicken, or egg salad	Keep	Discard
Cooked pasta, pasta salads with mayonnaise or vinegar base	Keep	Discard
Gravy stuffing	Keep	Discard
Pies, Breads:	Food Still Cold, Held At 40° F Or Above Under 2 Hours	Held Above 40° F For Over 2 Hours
Cream or cheese filled pastries and pies	Keep	Discard
Fruit pies	Keep	Keep
Breads, rolls, cakes, muffins, quick breads	Keep	Keep
Refrigerator biscuits, rolls, cookie dough	Keep	Discard