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Keeping Food Safe When The Lights Go Out

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College of Agriculture, Human and Natural Sciences

Disaster Education Response Team



Keeping Food Safe When The Lights Go Out

Sandria L. Godwin, Leslie Speller-Henderson, Richard Stone

Electricity plays an extremely important role in keeping food safe. It powers the refrigerator, range, and lights. Taking the proper actions before, during, and after a power outage will help keep you and your food safe.

• Preparing For A Possible Power Outage

- Keep an appliance thermometer in your refrigerator and freezer.
- Freeze water in thoroughly washed or new plastic containers. These can be used to keep food cold in the refrigerator, freezer, or cooler. As the water thaws, it can be used for drinking.
- Purchase a generator if possible. Be sure to check your generator frequently to make sure it still works.
- Have a good quality cooler on hand. Put ice packs in the freezer.
- Freeze refrigerated items, such as meat, milk and leftovers, that are not going to be used immediately.

• What To Do During A Power Outage

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- Place foods in a cooler with frozen ice or gel packs if the freezer is already full.
- Fill empty containers with water and place them outside to freeze if it is cold enough. Use the frozen containers in the refrigerator, freezer or cooler. Snow and ice can also be used but must be sealed in a separate container before putting in the refrigerator or freezer.
- Do not place food outside to keep it cold. Outside temperatures can vary, and animals or bugs might get into the food you are trying to keep safe.
- Keep foods close together in the freezer, which helps the freezer keep its temperature longer.
- Foods can be heated over a fire in the fireplace if properly ventilated. **Never** use camp stoves, grills, or contained fires to heat foods indoors. They are a potential fire hazard and pose a risk of exposure to the toxic gases they release.



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Disaster Education Resources
Call (615) 963-1375 for further information.*



- **What About After A Power Outage?**

- Discard refrigerated perishable foods such as milk, meat, and dairy products after 4 hours without power.
- Check the temperature of the food in the freezer. Food that is still below 40°F (4.4°C) should be safe to eat. Foods that have defrosted completely and are not below 40°F (4.4°C) should be thrown out.
- Appliance thermometers should be placed in your refrigerator and freezer so you know the inside temperature during and after a power outage.
- Food thermometers should be used to measure the temperatures of foods that have been defrosted, making sure they are still below 40°F (4.4°C) .
- Check for ice crystals on the food in the freezer. If there are ice crystals on the food in the freezer, it can be refrozen or cooked.
- Throw out any food that has an unusual texture, color, or odor.
- Never taste food to see if it is safe. Throwing the food out may save you discomfort, doctor bills, or even a hospital stay later.



Above are examples of **appliance thermometers** that you should place in your refrigerator, freezer, and coolers so you will know the inside temperature.



Above are examples of **food thermometers** that you should use to check the temperatures of foods.

REMEMBER

WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!!



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