

Restaurant and Retail Food Facilities

Responding to a Power Outage

Practicing safe food handling during a power outage is challenging. As most facility equipment is dependent upon electricity to work, most facilities simply cannot operate during a power outage. *The goal during a power outage will be to maintain cold and frozen foods at or below 41°F.*

A packaged food store would possibly be able to stay open and sell only packaged non-refrigerated/frozen foods. Food processing or food handling **would not** be permitted unless there is an alternative power supply or if the facility can show that proper water temperatures, proper handwashing stations, lighting, equipment and similar can be provided in an alternate sufficient fashion. If you are interested in continuing to operate during a power outage on a limited basis using an alternate power supply, your facility operations should be reviewed with your Sanitarians or Local Health Department prior to continued operation.

Steps to follow to prepare for a possible power outage:

1. Always be prepared. Have a written contingency plan that is developed ahead of time in the event of a power outage or other natural disasters. What will be your standard operating procedures during an event of this type? Make sure your staff is knowledgeable and trained to respond to a power outage or other natural disaster event and know where to find these procedures should they need to reference them.
2. Make sure your freezers are at or below zero degrees Fahrenheit and the refrigerators are at 41°F or below.
3. Put a thermometer in your freezers and refrigerators so they can be easily seen when a unit is quickly opened.
4. Pre-freeze containers of water for ice to help keep food cold in smaller freezers, refrigerators or coolers after power is out.
5. Freeze any refrigerated foods such as leftovers, meats, dairy products, and similar that you may not need immediately. In a frozen state, even if thawing, you may be able to salvage the items by keeping them out of the danger zone and below 41°F.
6. Know where your local suppliers of dry ice, block ice or gas powered generators are located and have their addresses and phone numbers available in your facility.
7. Have coolers on hand to use for refrigerated food should the power be out more than 4 hours.

During a power outage:

1. Note the time of day.
2. Move foods from open refrigerator or frozen food case to walk-in boxes or closed units. This should be done as a proactive step if a power outage is anticipated.
3. Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperatures.
4. The refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours. As a rule, after 4 hours in non-operating refrigerator, food should not be consumed. If however you can verify that food has not been above 41°F for more than 2 hours, the food could still be consumed. If this cannot be verified the food should not be consumed unless it is still below 41°F.
5. Foods such as meat, poultry, seafood, soft cheese, leftovers and other similar potentially hazardous foods should be discarded if they are held above 41°F for more than 2 hours.
6. A freezer will keep food safely cold for about 48 hours (24 hours if half full and the doors remain closed).
7. Food from freezer that begins to thaw may be safely refrozen if it is still semi-solid with ice crystal formation. If frozen food is thawed, but still be below 41°F, food should be used in food preparation or if in a retail store setting, sold as thawed for customer convenience/previously frozen. Although it can be done, re-freezing thawed foods that were previously frozen, but maintained below 41°F, while safe, may lead to food quality degradation.
8. If electricity is going to be out for a prolonged period of time find a gas generator to utilize for your refrigerators and freezers, find a supplier of dry ice or obtain a refrigerated truck to utilize for temporary storage.
9. Fifty pounds of dry ice should hold an 18 cubic foot full freezer for 2 days.
10. Discard any perishable foods after 4 hours if the food temperature has elevated above 41°F without power or some form of temperature control.
11. Be cautious when moving food around or when placing them in alternative cold holding units that you are not creating a cross-contamination issue. Keep raw foods away from ready to eat foods.
12. NEVER taste a food or drink to determine its safety! When in doubt throw it out.
13. If food was allowed to spoil in the refrigerators or freezer be sure to clean and sanitize the units thoroughly before restocking with food. You may even need to deodorized units that had spoiled foods in them.

If you have experienced a power outage for an extended period of time, contact your Food Sanitarian for assistance in determining the safety of the affected food.