Indiana State Department of Health

Food Protection Program
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http://www.in.gov/isdh/regsvcs/foodprot/index.htm

Food Safety during Power Outages

When there is a Power Outage:

- Note the time the power outage begins.
- Discontinue all cooking operations.
- Do not place hot food in refrigerators or freezers, as this will rapidly raise the temperature inside the refrigerator or freezer and may make more food unusable.
- Discard food products that are in the process of being cooked, but which have not yet reached the final cooking temperature.
- Maintain hot potentially hazardous food at 135°F or above. Food that has reached final cooking temperature may be kept hot (135°F) by the use of canned heat in chafing dishes.
- Use ice or ice baths to rapidly cool small batches of hot food.

Information on Potentially Hazardous Foods:

Potentially hazardous foods are those foods, such as high protein foods (meat, eggs, dairy) and cooked vegetables, that support the rapid and progressive growth of disease causing bacteria.
Foodborne illnesses can be caused by bacteria that can multiply rapidly in foods when the food is held in the temperature danger zone (41° to 135°F).

Keep foods at safe temperatures:

Refrigerated potentially hazardous foods must be stored at or below 41°F. Frozen foods must be maintained frozen. Hot potentially hazardous food must be maintained at 135°F or above.

Freezers

Leave the freezer door closed. A full freezer should keep food safe about two (2) days, and a half-full freezer, about one (1) day. Add bags of ice or dry ice to the freezer if it appears the power will be off for an extended time. You can safely re-freeze thawed foods that still contain ice crystals and are 41°F or less.

Caution: the use of dry ice may result in the unsafe build-up of carbon dioxide.

Refrigerators

Food in refrigerators should be safe as long as the power is out no more than about four (4) to six (6) hours. Leave the door closed because every time you open it, needed cold air escapes, allowing the foods inside to reach unsafe temperatures. Discard any potentially hazardous food that has been above 41°F for (4) four hours or more, any non potentially hazardous food that has reached a temperature of 45°F or higher for any length of time, or has an unusual color, odor, or texture.

When in doubt, throw it out!

If it appears the power will be off for more than six (6) hours, ice, dry ice, or frozen gel packs may be used to keep potentially hazardous foods at 41°F or below. Moving refrigerated food to a walk-in freezer or obtaining a refrigerated truck are other options to keep food safe. Food should not be transferred to private homes.

The Decision to Discard or Save

The following are examples of foods that can be discarded or saved once power is restored.

Discard

The following foods in refrigerators and freezers should be discarded if kept over four (4) hours at above 41°F or if the temperature exceeds 41°F for any length of time.

- Meat, poultry, fish, eggs and egg substitutes - raw or cooked
- Milk, cream, soft and semi soft cheese
- Casseroles, stews or soups
- Lunch meats and hot dogs
- Creamy-based foods made on-site
- Custard, pumpkin or cheese pies
- Cream-filled pastries
- Cookie dough made with eggs
- Whipped butter
- Cut melons
- Cooked vegetables

Save

The following foods may be kept at room temperature a few days although food quality may be affected.

- Butter or margarine
- Hard and processed cheeses
- Fresh uncut fruits and vegetables
- Dried fruits and coconut

- Opened jars of vinegar-based salad dressings, jelly, relish, taco sauce, barbecue sauce, mustard, ketchup, olives and peanut butter
- Fruit juices
- Fresh herbs and spices
- Fruit pies, breads, rolls, and muffins
- Cakes, except cream cheese frosted or cream-filled
- Flour and nuts

When Power is Restored:
Identify and discard potentially hazardous foods that may have been above 41°F or below 135°F for four (4) or more hours or above 41°F for any length of time.

Check the internal food temperatures using a food thermometer and record the temperature. If practical, separate packages of food in refrigeration units and freezers to allow for faster re-cooling.

The refreezing of food may affect the quality and should be used within a short period of time.