



Foodborne Illness Prevention Program Emergency Response Fact Sheet for Licensed Facilities

POWER OUTAGE

A power outage can potentially affect a restaurant in the following ways:

1. Refrigeration will not be functional
2. Cooking, hot holding, mechanical dishwashing, and equipment that require power for operation may not be functional
3. Hot water may not be available
4. The facility may not have water service if it is supplied by a well with an electric pump

In most cases of power failure, the restaurant should be closed. Operators should close voluntarily. However, some facilities may have backup power generation or gas-powered appliances, such as stoves or hot water heaters, and could possibly continue to operate.

Facilities remaining open need access to large amounts of ice for cooling foods and maintaining product temperatures. In these situations, the facility must implement alternative procedures to continue to meet the requirements of the Food Sanitation Rules. Some facilities will have to be limited to the sale of non-potentially hazardous foods or foods that require little or no preparation. Ultimately, the local health inspector will have to determine if each facility can continue to operate in a safe and sanitary manner. Some guidelines for salvaging foods are:

Refrigerated Foods

Potentially hazardous foods must be evaluated to determine whether proper storage temperatures have been maintained.

If it is known how long the power has been out:

- ❑ If the power has been out for less than 4 hours and the power is expected back on shortly, then the refrigerator should be kept closed. When the power comes back on, the temperature of potentially hazardous foods should be taken to make sure they are at 41F or below. Foods above 41F should be cooled to 41F or below in ice and placed back into refrigeration
- ❑ If the power has been out for less than 4 hours and the power is not expected to return shortly, potentially hazardous foods should be iced to keep them cold
- ❑ If the power has been out for more than 4 hours, food temperatures should be taken. Potentially hazardous foods with temperatures of 41F or less should be iced immediately
- ❑ Consider discarding potentially hazardous foods at temperatures greater than 41F

If it is not known how long the power has been out:

- ❑ Potentially hazardous food temperatures should be taken immediately. Foods with temperatures of 41F or less should be iced immediately to maintain the temperatures
- ❑ Consider discarding potentially hazardous foods at temperatures greater than 41F

Frozen Foods

Foods stored in freezers will generally stay frozen or below 41F for a day or two during a power outage. The actual time the food will remain frozen or cold, however, depends on the size and type of the freezer, the types and amounts of food stored in the unit, the temperature of the frozen food, and whether or not the unit is well insulated.

Full or well-insulated freezers will keep food frozen longer than partially full or poorly insulated ones, and larger freezers will keep food frozen longer than smaller units. Foods such as meat and poultry will stay frozen longer than baked goods.

All frozen foods should be moved to a functional freezer if one is available. Make sure the food is insulated and protected from contamination during transportation. If the food cannot be moved, leave it in the freezer and cover the unit with blankets or newspapers to insulate the unit. Foods should be grouped together to try to keep foods colder longer. Meat and poultry should be stored below and away from other foods (in case they begin to thaw) to prevent cross contamination from dripping juices. If it is available, dry ice can be used in the unit to keep foods cold.

Frozen foods that have been thawed:

- ❑ Potentially hazardous foods that have thawed or are partially thawed need to be checked to see if they are still safe to keep or refreeze when the power is restored
- ❑ If the power has been out long enough for foods to thaw, then product temperatures should be taken
- ❑ Consider discarding potentially hazardous foods at temperatures greater than 41F
- ❑ Potentially hazardous foods at 41F or less should be iced and maintained at that temperature until power is restored

Hot Foods

Foods that are being cooked or are in a hot holding device when the power goes out should be immediately cooled in an ice bath to 41F or below, and kept iced until the power is restored and the food can be placed under refrigeration. If there is not enough ice to cool hot foods then they should be discarded. There may be instances when a facility that has gas appliances can keep food hot in ovens or hot holding devices, assuming they are still functional.

If you have any questions regarding this document, please contact your local public health authority and ask to speak to the health inspector for your area.