



Guidance for Food Safety During Power Outages

Proper handling of food during and after an emergency situation is key to preventing a bad situation from becoming even worse. During power outages, food can easily slip into the Temperature Danger Zone of 41° - 135° F. The following tips can help you prevent cold and frozen foods from becoming unsafe to distribute to guests.

During a Power Outage:

- Check if your agency has experienced power outages. National Grid has an interactive map to check for outages in your area: <https://outagemap.ri.nationalgridus.com/>
- If your agency has lost power, begin tracking the temperature of product. If it is safe to go to your agency, note the date, time, and temperature of your refrigerators and freezers at the start of the power outage.
- According to the USDA, a fully stocked refrigerator can keep food cold for about 4 hours, and a fully stocked freezer will keep food cold up to 48 hours if the doors remain closed. These guidelines are not a guarantee, and you must still check the temperature of the unit after every outage.
- Dry or block ice can be placed inside refrigerators and freezers to help food remain cold as long as possible.
- Consider distributing non-perishables during storm issues – if your program has experienced a power loss, most likely so have the guests of your program at their homes. Although it seems like a good idea to give out as much of your perishables as possible, be sure guests can safely store the food at home before they take it from you.

After a Power Outage:

- Check and record the temperatures of your refrigerators and freezers as soon as the power comes back on.
 - **If the refrigerator reads above 41°F**, discard the food if the power outage lasted longer than 4 hours. If the power was out less than 4 hours, consult with your agency's Food Safety Manager or contact the Food Bank to determine the safest next step. *Remember, when in doubt – throw it out!*
 - **If the freezer reads above 0°F**, check for other signs of thawing. If there are signs of thawing such as melted water, softening of product, large ice crystals (a sign that product has melted and then refrozen), or slushy or frozen blood on the tray of a meat product, discard product.
 - **If food is at or above 50°F**, the food must be discarded regardless of how long the power outage was (including if the power was out less than 4 hours).
- **If you do not know when the power came back on and the outage lasted longer than 4 hours, discard the food no matter the temperature reading.** Your temperature reading may read as falsely safe if the cooler or freezer has started running again – food may have been in the Temperature Danger Zone during the outage.
- If you need to dispose of food, please make a note of all disposals on your invoices. Contact the Community Impact or Customer Services team and inform us of your loss. From time to time, we are able to replenish losses or supplement in some way.

Questions? Contact Us!