

FOOD AND WATER SAFETY FOR POWER OUTAGES

By the time your power resumes, many non-frozen and fresh foods left in your home will not be safe to eat even if they have been refrigerated. Harmful bacteria cause many foods to spoil quickly, especially in warm weather.

When deciding what to do with **freezer** contents, consider the following:

- Without power, a full, upright or chest freezer will keep everything frozen for about 2 days. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen 1 day.
- Squeeze packaged foods. If you can feel or hear the crunching of ice crystals, the food is only partially thawed and can be refrozen. If foods have partially thawed but have not reached room temperature, refreezing or immediate use is recommended.
- Never taste food to check for spoilage. *“When in doubt, throw it out.”* Food that has spoiled does not necessarily taste bad.
- All meat, dairy products, eggs, fish, seafood, processed cheese, vacuum packed meats or products containing the above should be discarded if they are warmer than 4°Celsius (40°Fahrenheit) for more than 4 hours.
- Watch for raw meat juices. Discard any food (including other meats) that has come in contact with raw meat juices. High protein content foods are very susceptible to spoilage and support the growth of disease-causing organisms.
- Remember, freezing and refreezing foods does not destroy disease-causing organisms.

When deciding what to do with **refrigerator** contents, consider the following:

- When refrigerated foods become warm, two things may occur: organisms can grow that cause spoilage of food or disease-causing organisms can grow causing illness. You cannot tell if food is safe to eat, or spoiled, by looking, tasting or smelling it.
- Without power, a refrigerator will keep food cool 4-6 hours. To keep food cold this long, keep the door shut as much as possible.
- If the outside temperature is 4°C or lower (40°F), food products can be stored out of the home, in a garage, shed or any location protected from animals, run-off water and snow. Food should be placed in containers and well covered for protection.
- All meat, dairy products, eggs, fish, seafood, processed cheese, vacuum packed meats or products containing the above should be discarded if they are warmer than 4°C (40°F) for more than 4 hours. High protein content foods are very susceptible to spoilage and support the growth of disease-causing organisms.
- Foods such as pickles, ketchup, soy sauce, mustard are more shelf stable at warmer temperatures.
- Never taste food to check for safeness. *“When in doubt, throw it out.”* Food that is unsafe does not necessarily taste or smell bad.

Disposal of Spoiled Food

- Discard spoiled food in leak-proof containers. Place the containers in a cool place out of reach of dogs, cats and other animals.

“Think Clean” During a Power Outage

- Wash hands with soap and water before and after handling and preparing food. If no hot water is available, wash your hands with soap and cold water for two minutes or use a hand sanitizer.
- Clean surfaces with a bleach solution of one teaspoon (5 mL) of bleach and three cups (750 mL) of water.

WATER SAFETY

- If you use water from your well for your home or food service business, a power outage will normally cause the water pump to fail. Use an alternate source of safe water, such as commercially bottled water or follow the instructions below for treating water.
- If you have a back-up power generator, use the water as you did before the power failure. Make sure that any water purification system you may use, such as an ultraviolet light, also continues to operate.
- If you are concerned about the safety of your water, use an alternate source of water or treat the water using one of the following methods:

Boiling Water

- Bring the water to a rolling boil for at least one minute (water should be bubbling and rolling).
- **If you are using a gas barbecue to boil water, use it only outdoors.**
During a power outage, never use gasoline or charcoal-burning devices, such as generators, grills, or camp stoves, inside your home, basement, or garage; or near a window. Carbon monoxide from these sources can build up in your home and poison the people and animals inside.

Treating Water

- If water cannot be boiled, add six drops of newly purchased liquid household bleach (unscented, 4 to 6 percent chlorine) per gallon (4.54 Litres) of water. Stir well and let the water stand for 30 minutes before using it. If you are going to make infant formula with the water, let the water stand overnight, covered with a clean paper towel or a loose lid, in a cooler or refrigerator before use. This will allow the bleach to do its job and then dissipate so that the bleach does not affect the taste of the formula.
- You may also use water purification tablets from your local pharmacy to treat tap water. Follow the directions on the label. Let the water stand overnight, uncovered, in a cooler or refrigerator. This will allow the purification tablet to do its job and then dissipate before use.

For more information, contact your Public Health Inspector at 705-474-1400 or 1-800-563-2808.