

Food Safety During and After Power Outages

1) **How long can food stay safe in the refrigerator with no power?**

In newer refrigerators that **were not opened** during the outage, foods should still be safe to use after 4 hours. In older refrigerators, or ones that were opened during the outage, it is difficult to make an assessment of how long foods will stay safe. The best rule is “When in Doubt, Throw it Out”. If you have an accurate food thermometer, 45°F or colder is the safe zone. Once food approaches 70°F it is considered to be at room temperature, and should be discarded.

These are a few guidelines for various types of food:

- ❖ Hard cheeses, butter, margarine are safe unless mold or rancidity develop
- ❖ Fresh vegetables and fruits are safe as long as they are not slimy.
- ❖ Eggs are safe for two days if shells are intact.
- ❖ Fresh poultry, meats, cold cuts, hot dogs, and other perishables should be discarded or eaten if food approaches room temperature.
- ❖ Milk and other dairy products should be discarded after the refrigerator power is off for than 4 hours.
- ❖ Mayonnaise, vinegar and oil commercially prepared dressings, jellies, jams, relishes, ketchup, mustard, and pickles may be left unrefrigerated unless they have been contaminated with poultry, fish or meat products.

2) **How long will food remain safe in the freezer?**

If the opening of the freezer was kept to a minimum, a well stocked freezer that is in good condition should keep foods frozen for up to 48 hours. Fully stocked chest freezers will keep foods frozen for up to 72 hours. Large cuts of meat and poultry will stay frozen longer than baked goods or smaller items.

3) **What previously frozen foods will be safe to use or re-freeze?**

Frozen poultry, fish, meats, fruits, and vegetables can be safely refrozen if they still have ice crystals present, or are still cold (40°F or colder), but there may be some loss of quality. Re-frozen foods should be used as soon as possible. When cooking the re-frozen foods, keep in mind that they have been thawed once. If thawing is necessary, do it in the refrigerator, or use the microwave and cook immediately after.

Discard any food that has an off color or odor, or food that has warmed to room temperature for an unknown amount of time. Again, “When in Doubt, Throw it Out”