



Power Outage Alert

The Department of Public Health (DPH) recognizes the impact that power outages have on retail food operations. This bulletin is provided to assist retail food facility operators experiencing a power outage.

During a power outage, immediate action must be taken to determine which food is safe to keep and which food must be discarded. Considering whether a facility should continue operation is crucial in protecting public health and safety.

HANDLING FOOD DURING A POWER OUTAGE

Food held in refrigerators or freezers may be at risk when the power goes out, but loss of power may not mean loss of food. Generally, food can be held safely in refrigerators for a few hours as long as the power outage is of short duration and the following recommendations are followed:

- If a power outage is possible due to rolling blackouts or high fire danger, take actions to prepare your food facility. Have plenty of ice or dry ice available to keep foods cold during an extended power outage.
- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed to maintain coldest temperatures, while power is off.
- Don't try to cool prepared foods. Dispose of prepared foods as they will raise the temperature of the refrigerator.
- Place thermometers within each refrigerator. Built-in digital thermometers will not function and cannot be relied on to monitor rising food temperatures.
- Consider transporting potentially hazardous foods to an approved operational cold storage facility (such as a facility not affected by a power loss, or a refrigeration truck or ice storage).
- Extend storage life of high risk foods by using clean, uncontaminated ice and/or dry ice if doors must be opened. Re-close doors.

YOU CANNOT RELY ON THE APPEARANCE OR ODOR OF FOOD ITEMS TO DETERMINE IF THEY WILL MAKE YOU SICK. IF IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIALLY HAZARDOUS FOOD:

- Identify foods that have been in the danger zone (between 41-135°F) and discard as necessary. Food items that have been held above 41°F for more than four hours should be discarded.
- Check foods with a probe thermometer to insure proper temperature maintenance has not been compromised (sanitize the thermometer with an alcohol swab or chlorine solution before and after each use).
- Do not re-freeze thawed food.

POWER OUTAGE PRECAUTIONS

If your food facility is experiencing any of the following conditions, you should close your food facility until such time that the conditions have been rectified:

- No hot water (especially with electric water heaters).
- Unsafe food temperatures due to the lack of power to food holding equipment.
 - Refrigeration units,
 - Freezer units,
 - Hot-holding units.
- Lack of power to hood ventilation system and make-up air vent for gas equipment.
- Inability to properly wash and sanitize multi-use consumer utensils.
- Lack of lighting in the food preparation area.

If your food facility is open and DPH observes any of the above conditions, you will be directed to close your facility.

ADDITIONAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER:

Some additional factors that may influence this decision include:

- Potential liability regarding foodborne illness associated with the mishandling of food during abnormal conditions.
- Minimizing product loss due to continued use of inoperable refrigeration units.
- Potential liability associated with consumer and employee exposure to unsafe, dark or low light conditions.
- Loss of customer confidence due to compromised service and food quality.

RE-OPENING GUIDELINES

Retail food facilities that have voluntarily opted to close (e.g. self-initiated closure), should verify the following conditions prior to resuming food preparation and/or sale of prepackaged foods:

- Hot (minimum 120°F) and cold potable water under pressure are available utensil washing and warm water is available for handwashing.
- Verify that all power breakers have been properly reset as needed (especially at the hot water heater and automatic gas supply solenoid).
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- Electricity and natural gas (if applicable) services are available.
- Refrigeration and/or freezer units are fully operable and capable of maintaining food temperatures 41°F or below for refrigeration units; food in a solid state for freezers.
- Hot food holding units are capable of maintaining food temperatures at 135°F or above.
- Adequate and approved ventilation for gas-powered equipment is operable.
- Adequate and approved lighting is available.
- All food can be protected from contamination.
- All potentially hazardous foods out of temperature are discarded properly.

- Foods that were subsequently thawed in freezer units are not re-frozen.

NOTE: All food facilities must be in compliance with the California Retail Food Code prior to reopening. If your facility was closed by DPH, you must remain closed until you obtain approval to reopen.

For additional information, please contact Environmental Health at (888) 700-9995.