



Hunterdon County

Department of Public Safety

Division of Public Health Services



www.co.hunterdon.nj.us/health.html

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Important Information for Restaurants and Food Establishments During Power Outages

Flemington – As you are aware, there is another impending storm predicted for our area this week. The County is still recovering from last week's Winter Storm Riley and has increased their health inspections to ensure food safety among our retail food establishments.

The Division of Public Health is reminding residents and businesses to be mindful of food safety. A prolonged period without power can make safe food handling practices difficult, especially when it comes to keeping refrigerated and frozen foods at or below 41 degrees Fahrenheit. Key considerations to prepare your business for an emergency should include plans for long term power outages, loss of water supply, flooding and potential sewer backups.

To protect your inventory, please see the attached documents for additional information. Please keep in mind that all retail food establishments that experience a power loss greater than 5 hours, loss of water supply, flooding, or sewer backups, must obtain approval from the Hunterdon County Division of Public Health prior to re-opening. Please be advised that it is the responsibility of the restaurant or food establishment to dispose of all unsafe potentially hazardous food (see attached). If there are any questions about the safety of specific foods, contact the Division of Public Health. If you experience an extended power outage, flooding or sewage backup, please call the health department at 908-788-1351 to schedule an inspection.

Our goal is to get restaurants and retail food establishments back to business as quickly as possible, and we will do everything we can to assist you in recovery. We appreciate your patience and anticipated cooperation.

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Food Safety During Power Outages in Food Establishments

The following are recommendations that apply to food safety during an extended power outage (more than two hours).

Appropriate decision making before, during, and immediately after a power outage is necessary to protect consumers from unsafe food and minimize product loss.

The Hunterdon County Division of Public Health recommends that food establishments develop a power outage plan before the need arises.

When there is a Power Outage

- Note the time the power outage begins.
- Discontinue all cooking operations.
- Do not place hot food in refrigerators or freezers, as this will rapidly raise the temperature inside the refrigerator or freezer and may make more food unusable.
- Discard food products that are in the process of being cooked, but which have not yet reached the final cooking temperature.
- Maintain hot potentially hazardous food at 140° F or above. Food that has reached final cooking temperature may be kept hot (140° F) by use of canned heat in chaffing dishes.
- Use ice or/ice baths to rapidly cool small batches of hot food.

Food Safety

Potentially Hazardous Foods

Potentially hazardous foods are those foods such as high protein foods (meat, eggs, dairy) and cooked vegetables that support the rapid and progressive growth of disease-causing bacteria. Foodborne illnesses can be caused by bacteria that can multiply rapidly in foods when the food is held in the temperature danger zone (41° to 140° F).

Keep foods at safe temperatures

Refrigerated potentially hazardous foods must be stored at or below 41° F. Frozen foods must be maintained frozen. Hot cooked potentially hazardous food must be maintained at 140° F or above.

Freezers

Leave the freezer door closed. A full freezer should keep food safe about two days – a half-full freezer, about one day. Add bags of ice or dry ice to the freezer if it appears the power will be off for an extended time. You can safely re-freeze thawed foods that still contain ice crystals and are 41° F or less.

Caution: the use of dry ice may result in the unsafe build-up of carbon dioxide.

Refrigerators

Food in refrigerators should be safe as long as the power is out no more than about four to six hours. Leave the door closed; every time you open it, needed cold air escapes,

causing the foods inside to reach unsafe temperatures. Discard any potentially hazardous food that has been above 41° F for four hours or more, reached a temperature of 45° F or higher for any length of time, or has an unusual color, odor, or texture.

When in doubt, throw it out!

If it appears the power will be off for more than six hours, ice, dry ice, or frozen gel packs can be used to keep potentially hazardous foods at 41° F or below. Moving refrigerated food to a walk-in freezer or obtaining a refrigerated truck are other options to keep food safe. Food should not be transferred to private homes.

What to Discard

The following are examples of foods that can be discarded or saved once power is restored.

Discard

The following foods in refrigerators and freezers should be discarded if kept over four hours at above 41° F, or if the temperature exceeds 45° F for any length of time.

- Meat, poultry, fish, eggs and egg substitutes - raw or cooked
- Milk, cream and soft cheese
- Casseroles, stews or soups
- Lunch meats and hot dogs
- Creamy-based foods made on-site
- Custard, chiffon, pumpkin or cheese pies
- Cream-filled pastries
- Cookie dough made with eggs
- Whipped butter
- Cut Melons
- Cooked vegetables

Save

The following foods may be kept at room temperature a few days although food quality may be affected.

- Butter or margarine
- Hard and processed cheeses
- Fresh uncut fruits and vegetables
- Dried fruits and coconut
- Opened jars of vinegar-based salad dressings, jelly, relish, taco sauce, barbecue

sauce, mustard, ketchup, olives and peanut butter

- Fruit juices
- Fresh herbs and spices
- Fruit pies, breads, rolls, and muffins
- Cakes, except cream cheese frosted or cream-filled
- Flour and nuts

When Power is Restored

- Identify and discard potentially hazardous foods that may have been above 41° F or below 140° F for four or more hours or above 45° F for any length of time.
- Check the internal food temperatures using a food thermometer and record the temperature.
- If practical, separate packages of food in refrigeration units and freezers to allow for faster re-cooling.

If the location was vacated during the power outage, upon return the storage equipment may be fully functioning and the food may be at proper temperature. However, if the duration of the power outage and the highest temperature of the food cannot be verified, all potentially hazardous food must be discarded.

Disposal of Food

Small volumes of food can be denatured (such as with bleach, a detergent or other cleaning product to render it unusable) or alternatively destroyed and placed in an outside refuse bin for removal. To discard large volumes of food, the firm should contact a disposal company for immediate transportation to a licensed landfill.

* **Source:** "Emergency Action Planning Guidelines for Retail Food Establishments". New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services.

Full text at:

http://www.state.nj.us/health/foodanddrugsafety/documents/emergency_actionplans.pdf