

## **Keep Food Safe During a Power Outage**

When the power goes off, it is important to know how to keep frozen or refrigerated food safe to eat. A refrigerator can normally stay safely cold for four to six hours, depending on how warm your kitchen is. A fully stocked freezer will keep food frozen for two days if the door remains closed. A half-full freezer can keep foods frozen about one day.

If the power is out longer than four to six hours, refrigerated food can spoil. To keep food safe to eat, add a block of ice to the refrigerator. As the ice melts, the water may saturate food packages. Be sure to keep packages out of the water as it drains. High-protein foods, such as dairy products, meat, fish, and poultry, should be consumed as soon as possible if power is not restored immediately. These foods cannot be stored safely at room temperature. Fruits and vegetables can be kept safely at room temperature until there are obvious signs of spoilage, like mold, slime, or wilt.

To keep frozen foods safe when the electricity is off for more than one or two days, keep the freezer door closed. If friends or family have electricity, divide frozen foods among their freezers, or seek freezer space at a store, church, school, or commercial meat locker. Buying a block of ice or dry ice could also save frozen foods from spoiling. Twenty-five pounds of dry ice will keep a 10-cubic-foot freezer below freezing for three to four days. However, dry ice freezes everything it touches and should not be touched with bare hands. If food is still “cold-to-the-touch,” it may be cooked and eaten immediately, or refrozen.

If you have any questions, feel free to call Bill Jay Bruce, Director of Environmental Health at the Clay County Health Department at (618) 292-9138. Remember if in doubt, throw it out.