

Guidelines for Food Safety at Food Service Establishments during Power Outages

Section 750.120 b) of the Illinois Food Code States: “In the event of a fire, flood, power outage, or similar event that might result in the contamination of food, or that might prevent potentially hazardous food from being held at required temperatures, the person in charge shall immediately contact the regulatory authority. Upon receiving notice of this occurrence, the regulatory authority shall take whatever action that it deems necessary to protect the public health.”

Considerations for whether or not a facility continues operation is primarily to prevent unnecessary threats to public health and safety. However, other 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.

Keeping 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 loss of power does not always mean loss of food. Generally, food in the refrigerator is safe as long as the power outage is of short duration. A refrigerator can normally stay safely cold for a few hours, depending on how warm your kitchen is. If the power is out longer than four to six hours, refrigerated food can spoil.

To keep food safe to eat:

- Keep the doors closed to maintain coldest temperatures, while power is off.
- 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 reopened. Re-close doors. As the ice melts, the water may saturate food packages. Be sure to keep packages out of the water as it drains.
- Fruits and vegetables can be kept safely at room temperature until there are obvious signs of spoilage, such as mold, slime, or wilt.
- When in doubt, throw it out. You cannot rely on appearance or odor to tell you if a food will make you sick.

Recommendations for Potentially Hazardous Foods:

- Identify foods that have been in the temperature danger zone (between 41° F - 135° F) and discard as necessary.
- 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 after each use.
- Do not re-freeze thawed Potentially Hazardous Foods.

Prior to continuing operations, ensure that:

- Hot (minimum 120°F) and cold potable water under pressure are available.
- Verify that all power breakers have been properly reset as needed (especially at the hot water heater and automatic gas supply solenoid).
- Handwashing facilities are fully operable.
- Toilet facilities are fully operable.
- 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 are operable.
- Proper dishwashing and sanitizing of multi-use utensils are available.
- Adequate and approved lighting are available.
- All food can be protected from contamination.
- All potentially hazardous foods that have been in the temperature damage zone are discarded properly.
- Potentially Hazardous Foods that were subsequently thawed in freezer units are not re-frozen.

Should I Save It or Throw It Out?

Refrigerated Foods

Food	Held above 41° F for over 2 hours
MEAT, POULTRY, SEAFOOD	
Fresh or leftover meat, poultry, fish, or seafood	Discard
Thawing meat or poultry	
Meat, tuna, shrimp, chicken, or egg salad	Discard
Gravy, stuffing	Discard
Lunchmeats, hot dogs, bacon, sausage, dried beef	Discard
Pizza (with any topping)	Discard
Canned hams labeled “Keep Refrigerated”	Discard
Canned meats, opened	Discard
CHEESE	
Soft Cheeses: blue/bleu, Roquefort, Brie, Camembert, cottage, cream, Edam, Monterey Jack, ricotta, mozzarella, Muenster, Neufchatel	Discard
Hard Cheeses: Cheddar, Colby, Swiss, Parmesan, Provolone, Romano	Safe
Processed Cheeses	Safe
Shredded Cheeses	Discard
Low-fat Cheeses	Discard
Grated Parmesan, Romano, or combination (in a can or jar)	Safe
DAIRY	
Milk, cream, sour cream, buttermilk, evaporated milk, yogurt	Discard
Butter, margarine	Safe
Baby formula (opened)	Discard
EGGS	
Fresh eggs, hard-cooked in shell, egg dishes, egg products	Discard
Custards and puddings	Discard
CASSEROLES, SOUPS, STEWS	
All casseroles, soups, and stews	Discard
FRUITS	
Fresh fruits (cut)	Discard
Fruit juices (opened)	Safe
Canned fruits (opened)	Safe
Fresh fruits, coconut, raisins, dried fruits, candied fruits, dates	Safe
SAUCES, SPREADS, JAMS	
Opened mayonnaise, tartar sauce, horseradish	Discard if above 50° F for over 8 hours.
Peanut butter	Safe
Jelly, relish, taco sauce, barbecue sauce, soy sauce, mustard, catsup, olives	Safe
Worcestershire sauce	Discard
Fish sauces (oyster sauce)	Discard
Hoisin sauce	Discard
Opened vinegar-based dressings	Safe
Opened creamy-based dressings	Discard
Spaghetti sauce (opened jar)	Discard

BREAD, CAKES, COOKIES, PASTA	
Bread, rolls, cakes, muffins, quick breads	Safe
Refrigerator biscuits, rolls, cookie dough	Discard
Cooked pasta, spaghetti	Discard
Pasta salads with mayonnaise or vinaigrette	Discard
Fresh pasta	Discard
Cheesecake	Discard
Breakfast foods (waffles, pancakes, bagels)	Safe
PIES, PASTRY	
Pastries (cream filled)	Discard
Pies (custard, cheese filled, or chiffon)	Discard
Pies (fruit)	Safe
VEGETABLES	
Fresh mushrooms, herbs, spices	Safe
Greens (pre-cut, pre-washed, packaged)	Discard
Vegetables (raw)	Safe
Vegetables (cooked)	Discard
Vegetable juice (opened)	Discard
Baked potatoes	Discard
Commercial garlic in oil	Discard
Potato Salad	Discard

Should I Save It or Throw It Out?

Frozen Foods

Food	Still contains ice crystals and feels as cold as if refrigerated	Thawed. Held above 41° F for over 2 hours
MEAT, POULTRY, SEAFOOD		
Beef, veal, lamb, pork, and ground meats	Refreeze	Discard
Poultry and ground poultry	Refreeze	Discard
Variety meats (liver, kidney, heart, chitterlings)	Refreeze	Discard
Casseroles, stews, soups	Refreeze	Discard
Fish, shellfish, breaded seafood products	Refreeze. Some texture and flavor loss.	Discard
DAIRY		
Milk	Refreeze. May lose some texture.	Discard
Eggs (out of shell) and egg products	Refreeze	Discard
Ice cream, frozen yogurt	Discard	Discard
Cheese (soft and semi-soft)	Refreeze. May lose some texture.	Discard
Hard cheeses	Refreeze	Refreeze
Shredded cheeses	Refreeze	Discard
Casseroles containing milk, cream, eggs, soft cheeses	Refreeze	Discard
Cheesecake	Refreeze	Refreeze.
FRUITS		
Juices	Refreeze	Refreeze. Discard if mold, yeasty smell, or sliminess develops.
Home or commercially packaged	Refreeze. Will change texture and flavor.	Refreeze. Discard if mold, yeasty smell, or sliminess develops.
BREADS, PASTRIES		
Breads, rolls, muffins, cakes (without custard fillings)	Refreeze	Refreeze
Cakes, pies, pastries with custard or cheese filling	Refreeze	Discard
Pie crusts, commercial and homemade bread dough	Refreeze. Some quality loss may occur.	Refreeze. Quality loss is considerable.
OTHER		
Casseroles (pasta, rice based)	Refreeze	Discard
Flour, cornmeal, nuts	Refreeze	Refreeze
Breakfast items (waffles, pancakes, bagels)	Refreeze	Refreeze
Frozen meal, entrée, specialty items (pizza, sausage and biscuit, meat pie, convenience foods)	Refreeze	Discard