

Guidelines for Food Safety During Temporary Power Outages

This Food Safety Notice is being issued by the Department of Health Services' Food and Drug Branch on behalf of the California Food Safety Task Force to provide guidance to the retail food industry. It was developed through the collaborative efforts of the Retail Food Industry, food safety experts at the University of California at Davis, the California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health, California Conference of Local Health Officers, and the California Department of Health Services.

California is experiencing an electrical power crisis resulting in random, unscheduled power outages. Appropriate decision-making before, during, and immediately after power outages is necessary to protect consumers from unsafe food and minimize product loss. The Department recommends that food retailers develop a plan and obtain appropriate emergency supplies before the need arises.

The food items of concern are those that are potentially hazardous foods (PHF). Generally, PHF are moist, perishable foods in and on which bacteria can grow most easily during the time when the food is held in the temperature danger zone (41°F to 140°F).

A POWER OUTAGE OF 2 HOURS OR LESS IS NOT CONSIDERED HAZARDOUS TO FOOD THAT IS HELD UNDER SAFE CONDITIONS WHEN THE OUTAGE BEGINS.

WHEN THERE IS A POWER OUTAGE...

- Note the time at which the power outage begins.
- Discard food products that are in the process of being cooked, but which have not yet reached the final temperature.

ACTIONS THAT CAN KEEP FOOD SAFE FOR SEVERAL HOURS

Cold Potentially Hazardous Foods

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible
- If practical, group packages of cold food together to reduce heat gain
- Cover open refrigerated and frozen food cases, especially vertical displays
- *Caution: The use of dry ice may result in unsafe build-up of CO₂ (Carbon Dioxide).*

Hot Potentially Hazardous Foods

- Do not place hot foods in refrigerators or freezers
- Use "canned heat" under foods on electric steam tables to help maintain PHF at 140°F
- Use ice and/or ice baths to rapidly cool small batches of hot food

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DISCONTINUE FOOD PREPARATION IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS EXIST

- Inability to properly wash, rinse and sanitize utensils
- Inoperative hood ventilation and make-up air supply systems in conjunction with gas or solid fuel heating and cooking equipment
(Danger: Toxic fumes may cause injury or death)
- Lack of sufficient light in food preparation areas to allow for safe food preparation and cleaning and sanitizing of food contact surfaces.
- No hot water, inadequate water pressure
- Unsafe food temperatures (See tables below)

WHEN THE POWER IS RESTORED

- Identify PHF that may have been in the temperature danger zone
- Check the internal food temperature
- If practical, separate packages of food in refrigeration units and freezers to allow for faster re-cooling.

Use the following to determine the disposition of PHF:

REFRIGERATED PHF

Use the table below as a guide for handling PHF stored in refrigeration units during power outages:

Duration of Power Outage (hours)	Food Temperatures		
	45° F or below	46°F to 50°F	50°F or above
0-2	PHF can be sold	Immediately cool PHF to 45°F or below within 2 hours	PHF cannot be sold
2-3	PHF can be sold, but must be cooled to 41°F or below within 2 hours	Immediately cool PHF to 45°F or below within 1 hour.	
4+	Immediately cool PHF to 41°F or below within 1 hour	PHF cannot be sold	

PHF IN HOT HOLDING UNITS

Use the following table to determine what to do with PHF that is held in hot holding units and is below 140°F at the time the power is restored:

Duration of Power Outage	Food below 140°F in Hot Holding Units When Power is Restored
2 hours or less	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. May be sold if reheated to 165° F and then held at 140° F or above; or 2. May be sold if rapidly cooled to 41 ° F or below within 2 hours following restoration of power.
More than 2 hours	Cannot be sold

If food cannot be rapidly cooled as specified in the tables above, it cannot be sold.

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REOPENING

If you voluntarily closed your facility, the following conditions should be verified prior to resuming food preparation and/or sale of potentially hazardous foods:

1. All unsafe potentially hazardous food has been discarded
 - If there are any questions regarding the safety of specific foods, contact your local environmental health agency
2. Electricity and gas services have been restored
3. All circuit breakers have been properly reset as needed
4. All equipment and facilities are operating properly, including:
 - Lighting
 - Refrigeration
 - Hot holding
 - Ventilation
 - Toilet facilities
5. Hot (minimum 120° F) and cold potable water, under pressure for:
 - Hand washing
 - Proper dishwashing

If your facility was closed by a local environmental health agency, it must remain closed until you obtain official approval from that agency to reopen.

DISPOSAL OF FOOD

- **PHF that has been subjected to temperature abuse prior to the power outage might not be safe to eat even if the procedures in the tables on the previous page are followed. WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**
- If it is determined that food must be discarded, document the type and amount of food and the reason for disposal for insurance and regulatory purposes.
- Small volumes of food to be discarded can be denatured with a cleaning product (such as bleach) and placed in the outside refuse bin.
- To discard large volumes of food, contact your refuse disposal company or your local landfill operator for disposal instructions.
- If there are any questions regarding the safety of specific foods, contact your local environmental health agency.

LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AGENCY

This document may serve as a guideline for most situations encountered during power outages. The local environmental health agency is primarily responsible for enforcing the California Uniform Retail Food Facilities Law, and shall determine appropriate actions to be taken based on local conditions.