



Power Outage Guidelines for Food Facilities

The Department of Public Health (DPH) recognizes the impact that power outages have on food operations. This bulletin is provided to assist food operators to plan for and respond to a power outage. Appropriate decision making before, during and immediately after a power outage is necessary to protect consumers from unsafe food and minimize product loss.

BE PREPARED

If a power outage is possible due to rolling blackouts or high fire danger, take actions to prepare your food facility:

- Consider having an electrical generator available.
- Ensure availability of a sufficient number of functional refrigerator and probe thermometers.
- Know where you can get dry ice or block ice.
- Have sufficient number of coolers (igloo, Cambro units) on hand to keep refrigerated food cold.
- Identify an alternative, approved, and operational cold-storage facility (such as a facility not affected by a power outage or a refrigeration truck).

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

In addition to protecting public health and safety, you should consider these additional factors when planning for, or responding to, a power outage:

- Potential liability regarding foodborne illness associated with the mishandling of food during abnormal conditions.
- Increased product loss due to repeated opening 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.

WHEN A POWER OUTAGE OCCURS

- Keep track of the time the outage begins.
- A power outage of 2 hours or less is not considered hazardous to food that was being held under safe conditions when the outage began.
- Take steps to keep food at safe temperatures (see below), especially if the outage will last longer than 2 hours.
- Food facilities may need to close if minimum standards for refrigeration, hot water, ventilation, dishwashing and lighting cannot be met.

OPERATING DURING A POWER OUTAGE

To ensure food safety and protect the public's health, all food facilities must be able to provide:

- Hot running water.
- Ability to maintain potentially hazardous foods at the proper food temperatures in refrigeration units, freezer units, and hot-holding units.
- Functioning hood ventilation system and make-up air vent for gas equipment.
- Ability to properly wash and sanitize multi-use consumer utensils.
- Adequate lighting in the food preparation area and the restrooms.

If your food facility cannot provide the above requirements, you should **voluntarily close** your food facility. You can then reopen as soon as power is restored and you can meet the above requirements. (See Re-opening Guidelines below.)

However, if you cannot meet the above requirements and DPH observes that your food facility has remained open, **you will be directed to close your facility at once. You will not be allowed to re-open until given approval to do so.**

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:

- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed to maintain coldest temperatures, while power is off.
- If possible, add clean, uncontaminated ice and/or dry ice to these units to help maintain lower temperatures. (Caution: If you use dry ice inside of walk-in refrigerators/freezers, it may cause an unsafe build-up of carbon dioxide in these units.)
- Place thermometers within each refrigerator. Built-in digital thermometers will not function and cannot be relied on to monitor rising food temperatures. Refrigerators should be kept at 41°F or below for proper food storage.
- If practical, group packages of cold food together. This can help keep food cold longer. However, keep raw meats away from other kinds of food.
- Don't place hot foods in the refrigerators or freezers as they will raise the temperature inside those units. Rapidly cool any hot prepared foods in an ice bath or dispose of these foods.
- Hot foods in a steam table may be held there for a short duration. If the power outage continues, then rapidly cool these foods in an ice bath or dispose of these foods.
- Consider transporting potentially hazardous foods to an approved operational cold storage facility.

You cannot rely on the appearance or odor of food items to determine if they will make you sick. If you believe that potentially hazardous foods have been held above 41°F for too long, you should discard them.

IF IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT.

ONCE THE POWER IS RESTORED

- Check the internal temperature of all cold and hot potentially hazardous foods using a probe thermometer. Sanitize the thermometer with an alcohol swab or chlorine solution before and after each use.
- Potentially hazardous food items that have been held above **41°F for more than four hours** must be **discarded**.
- All potentially hazardous cold food items with internal temperatures **above 50°F** must be **discarded**
- If cold foods were grouped together to keep them cold, space them out again so that they will cool more quickly.
- Do not re-freeze thawed food. Items that are served frozen, such as ice cream should be disposed of if thawed. Thawed foods requiring preparation may be moved to a working refrigerator or cooked once power is restored if they were not in the temperature danger zone.

RE-OPENING GUIDELINES

Retail food facilities that voluntarily closed in response to the power outage 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 for utensil washing and warm water (minimum 100°F) 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).
- 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.**

If you have questions regarding these guidelines, please contact
Environmental Health at (888) 700-9995 during regular business hours.