



Power Outage Alert

In the past, California has experienced electrical power shortages, which resulted in random unscheduled power outages. The Department recognizes the impact these conditions may have on retail food operations. This bulletin is provided to assist retail food facility operators experiencing a power outage.

During a power outage, immediate action must be taken to determine which food is safe to keep or must be discarded. Considering whether or not a facility should continue operation is crucial in protecting public health and safety. 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.

HANDLING FOOD DURING A POWER OUTAGE

Food held in refrigerators or freezers may be unsafe when the power goes out, but loss of power does not mean loss of food. Generally, food in the refrigerator is safe as long as the power outage is of short duration. Food can be held for a few hours if the following recommendations are followed:

- 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 opened. Re-close doors.

NOTE: YOU CAN NOT RELY ON APPEARANCE OR ODOR TO TELL IF A FOOD WILL MAKE YOU SICK.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIALLY HAZARDOUS FOOD:

- Identify foods that have been in the danger zone (between 41-135°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 food.

POWER OUTAGE PRECAUTIONS

Every attempt will be made by Environmental Health offices to assist and give reasonable consideration. If the Environmental Health Officer observes any of the following conditions, your establishment may be directed to discontinue operation until such time that the conditions have been rectified:

- No hot water (especially with electric water heaters).
- Unsafe food temperatures due to the lack of power to food holding equipment.
 - a. Refrigeration units.
 - b. Freezer units.
 - c. Hot-holding units.

- Lack of power to hood ventilation system and make-up air vent for gas equipment.
- Inability to properly wash and sanitize multi-use consumer utensils.
- Lack of lighting in the food preparation area.

In the event that an extended absence of power occurs, good business practice dictates that you voluntarily close your facility for safety and liability issues.

RE-OPENING GUIDELINES

Retail food facilities that have voluntarily opted to close (e.g. self-initiated closure), 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.
- 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 is operable.
- Proper dishwashing and sanitizing of multi-use utensils is available.
- 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 State Health and Safety Code prior to reopening. If your facility was closed by the Environmental Health Officer, you must remain closed until you obtain approvals to reopen.

Thank you for your continued support and effort in protecting public health and safety. For additional information, please contact your local Environmental Health Office or call (626) 430-5202.

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