

Keeping food Safe during a power Outage

Sooner or later, every home has a power outage. The electricity may have gone off during a snowstorm or thunderstorm, or the refrigerator may simply quit working. Whatever the cause, dealing with the food involved when the unit is off requires a knowledge of food safety.

USDA recommends the following guidelines;

Keep the Freezer Door Closed

Handling Dry Ice

Even If Food Has Started To Thaw, Some Foods Can Be

www Safely Kept

Many Foods Can Be Frozen Without Much Change In Taste

Keep an Appliance Thermometer in the Refrigerator and

www Freezer At All Times

Be Prepared

Rule's-of-Thumb Guide

Author

Keep the Freezer Door Closed

Keep what cold air you have inside. Don't open the door any more than necessary. You'll be relieved to know that a full freezer will stay at freezing temperatures about 2 days; a half-full freezer about 1 day. If your freezer is not full, group packages so they form an "igloo" to protect each other. Place them to one side or on a tray so that if they begin thawing, their juices won't get on other food. And, if you think power will be out for several days, try to find some dry ice (see box below). Although

dry ice can be used in the refrigerator, block ice is better. You can put it in the refrigerator's freezer unit along with your refrigerated perishables such as meat, poultry, and dairy items.

Handling Dry Ice

To locate a distributor of dry ice, look under "ice" or "carbon dioxide" in the phone book. Buy 25 pounds of dry ice to keep a 10 cubic-foot freezer full of food safe 3 to 4 days; half full, 2 to 3 days. A full 18 cubic-foot freezer requires 50 to 100 pounds of dry ice to keep food safe 2 days; half full, less than 2 days. Handle dry ice with caution and in a well-ventilated area. Don't touch it with bare hand; wear gloves or use tongs. Wrap dry ice in brown paper for longer storage. One large piece lasts longer than small ones. The temperature of dry ice is -216°F ; therefore, it may cause freezer burn on items located near or touching it. Separate dry ice from the food using a piece of cardboard.

Even If Food Has Started To Thaw, Some Foods Can Be Safely Kept

The foods in your freezer that partially or completely thaw before power is restored may be safely refrozen if they still contain ice crystals or are 40°F or below. You will have to evaluate each item separately. See the attached charts for different frozen and refrigerated foods. Generally, be very careful with meat and poultry products or any food containing milk, cream, sour cream, or soft cheese. When in doubt, throw them out.

Partial thawing and refreezing may reduce the quality of some foods. Raw meats and poultry from the freezer can usually be refrozen without too much quality loss. Prepared foods, vegetables, and fruits can normally be refrozen, but there may be some quality loss. Fruit juices can be refrozen safely without much quality loss, but frozen fruit will become mushy. In general, refrigerated items should be safe as long as power is out no more than 4 hours. Keep the door closed as much as possible. Discard any perishable foods (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and leftovers) that have been above 40°F for 2 hours or more, and any food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture, or feels warm to the touch.

Keep an Appilance Thermometer in the Refrigerator and Freezer At All Times

This will remove the guesswork of just how cold the unit is because it will give you the exact temperature. The key to determining the safety of foods in the refrigerator and freezer is knowing how cold they are. The refrigerator temperature should be 40 °F or below; the freezer, 0 °F or lower.

Be Prepared

Stock up on shelf-stable foods – canned goods, juices, and "no-freeze" entrees. Plan ahead how you can keep foods cold. Buy some freeze-pak inserts and keep them frozen. Buy a cooler. Freeze water in plastic containers or store bags of ice. Know in advance where you can buy dry and block ice. Develop emergency freezer-sharing plans with friends in another part of town or in a nearby area.

Rule-of-Thumb Guides

For the actual handling of specific foods, follow the instructions at the FSIS Web site.

Ammonia Refrigeration

Genemco buys, sells, consigns, and brokers quality used food processing equipment, evaporators, homogenizers, pasteurizers, heat exchangers, refrigeration equipment, fillers, stainless steel tanks and other related equipment for the food processing industry.