



Clark County Public Health

Fact Sheet

Keeping Food Safe During Power Outages

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF THE POWER GOES OUT?

Try to keep the doors of refrigerator and freezer closed as much as possible. This keeps the cold air inside.

- If the power is out for less than 2 hours, then the food in refrigerator and freezer will be safe to consume.
- If the power is out for longer than 2 hours, use the following guidelines:
 - ✓ In the refrigerator section: Pack milk, dairy products, meat, fish, eggs, gravy, and spoilable leftovers in a cooler surrounded by ice. Styrofoam coolers are fine for this purpose.
 - ✓ For the freezer section: A freezer that is half-full will hold food safely for up to 24 hours. A freezer that is full will hold food safely for 48 hours. **Keep the door closed.**
 - ✓ Use a digital quick-response stem thermometer to check the temperature of food right before cooking or eating it. Throw away any food that is warmer than 40 °F.

WHAT FOODS SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT?

Food can be categorized into groups. They may be 1) **POTENTIALLY HAZARDOUS FOODS**, 2) **NON-HAZARDOUS**, but quality, not safety, could be affected from changes in temperature, or 3) **SAFE**.

- **POTENTIALLY HAZARDOUS FOODS** include meat, fish, poultry, dairy products, eggs, eggs products, soft cheeses, cooked beans, cooked rice, cooked potatoes, cooked pasta, potato/pasta/macaroni salads, custards, puddings, cut melons and bean sprouts.
- Some foods may be **NON-HAZARDOUS** but the *quality* of the food may be affected by increases in temperature. These foods include salad dressings, mayonnaise, butter, margarine, produce, hard cheeses and so on.
- Some foods are **SAFE**, such as carbonated beverages, unopened bottled juices, ketchup, mustard, relishes, jams, peanut butter, barbeque sauce, and so on.

WHEN SHOULD FOOD BE THROWN AWAY & WHEN CAN FOOD BE SAFE TO KEEP?

- Do not rely on appearance, odor or taste to determine if food is safe. Use a digital quick response thermometer to check the internal temperature of the food. If **POTENTIALLY HAZARDOUS FOODS** are warmer than 40 °F, discard them.
- Refrigerated food should be safe as long as the power is out no more than 2 hours and the doors have been kept closed.
- Frozen food may have thawed, but is still safe if it is colder than 40°F. Use this food as soon as possible.

When in doubt, throw it out!

For more information contact: Clark County Environmental Public Health (360) 397-8428
www.clark.wa.gov

Websites with emergency tips: American Red Cross (Food Safety after a Power Outage)
www.redcross.org

USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (Keeping Food Safe in an Emergency)
www.fsis.usda.gov