



Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services

DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

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HEALTH ADVISORY

Food Safety Tips for Power Outages

Know what to do Before the Power Goes Out

As you are aware, California often experiences electrical power shortages resulting in random unscheduled blackouts. The Humboldt County Division of Environmental Health 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.

Voluntarily close your facility. Finish serving the customers already inside, but do not allow any more customers to come in. With no power, there is potential risk of foodborne illness associated with the mishandling of food. Furthermore, there is a concern for safety associated with consumer and employee to dark or low light conditions.

Leave the refrigerator door closed. Every time you open the door, cold air escapes, causing the food inside to reach unsafe temperatures. Refrigerated items should be safe as long as the power is out for no more than 4 to 6 hours. Discard any perishable food that has been above 41°F for 2 hours or more, and any food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture.

If it appears the power will be off more than 6 hours, transfer refrigerated perishable foods to an insulated cooler filled with ice or frozen gel packs. Keep a thermometer in the cooler to be sure the food stays at 41°F or below.

Leave the freezer door closed. A full freezer should keep food safe for about 2 days; a half-full freezer, about 1 day. Add bags of ice or dry ice to the freezer if it appears the power will be off for an extended time. Do not re-freeze foods that have thawed.

Keep a thermometer in the refrigerator and freezer at all times to see if food is being stored at safe temperatures (41°F for the refrigerator; 0°F for the freezer). The key to determining the safety of foods in the refrigerator and freezer is how cold they are. Foodborne illness is caused by bacteria that multiply rapidly at temperatures above 41°F.

Never taste food to determine its safety. You cannot rely on appearance or odor to tell you if a food will make you sick. Check temperatures with a probe thermometer and discard any food that has been in the danger zone (between 41°F and 135°F.)

(OVER)

Re-Opening Guidelines

If your facility was closed by an Environmental Health Specialist, you must remain closed until you obtain approval to reopen.

Retail food facilities that have voluntarily opted to close should verify the following conditions prior to resuming food preparation and/or sale of prepackaged foods:

All potentially hazardous food that is out of temperature is discarded.

Foods that were thawed in the freezer units are not re-frozen.

Hot and cold potable water under pressure is available.

Correct dishwashing and sanitizing of multi-use utensils are available.

Verify all power breakers have been properly reset as needed, especially at the hot water heater and automatic gas supply solenoid.

Hand washing facilities are fully operable.

Toilet facilities are fully operable.

Electricity and natural gas services are available.

Refrigeration and/or freezer units are fully operable and capable of maintaining correct temperatures. (41°F or colder in refrigeration units, food in a solid state for freezers.) Make sure the defrost cycle is properly reset.

Hot food holding units are capable of maintaining food temperatures at 135°F or hotter.

Adequate and approved ventilation for gas equipment is operable.

Adequate and approved lighting is available.

All food can be protected from contamination.

Thank you for your support and effort in protecting public health and safety. For further information contact:

Humboldt County Division of Environmental Health (707) 445-6215