

POWER OUTAGES

Food Safety During Power Outages in Food Establishments

- In the event of an extended power outage (more than four hours) or similar emergency that might prevent potentially hazardous food from being held at required temperatures, the person in charge shall immediately contact the Marion County Health Department, at (618)548-3878, to determine a course of action for minimizing product loss during the outage and for ensuring food safety once power is restored.
- Appropriate decision making before, during, and immediately after a power outage is necessary to protect the public from unsafe food. The Marion County Health Department recommends that food establishments develop a power outage plan before the need arises.

When There is a Power Outage

- Contact the Marion County Health Department at (618)548-3878.
- Note the time the power outage begins.
- Discontinue all cooking operations.
- Keep all cooler and freezer doors closed.
- Coolers/Freezers with external temperature gauges should be logged if easily done without opening the door.
- Do not place hot food in refrigerators or freezers, as this will rapidly raise the temperature inside the refrigerator or freezer and may make more food unusable.
- Discard food products that are in the process of being cooked, but which have not yet reached the final cooking temperature.

Time/Temperature Controlled for Safety (TCS) Foods

- Time/Temperature Controlled for Safety (TCS) Foods are those foods such as high protein foods (meat, eggs, dairy) and cooked vegetables that support the rapid and progressive growth of disease causing bacteria and other pathogens.
- Foodborne illnesses can be caused by bacteria and other pathogens that can multiply rapidly in foods when the food is held in the temperature danger zone (41° to 135°F).

Freezers

- Leave the freezer door closed. Open freezer doors only to add bags of ice, frozen gel packs, or dry ice to the freezer if it appears the power will be off for an extended time.
- Once power is restored, frozen foods which are still frozen (solid) may be sold/ consumed. Foods intended to be sold in a frozen state, but still at internal temperatures of less than 41°F and greater than 0°F may be immediately sold as a thawed, salvaged food item.

Refrigerators

- Food in refrigerators should be safe as long as the power is out no more than two to four hours. Leave the door closed; every time you open it, needed cold air escapes, causing the foods inside to reach unsafe temperatures. If a power outage in excess of four hours is expected, open the fridge only to add bags of ice or to move TCS foods to a walk-in freezer.



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Be Proactive to Minimize Product Loss

If it appears the power will be off for more than four hours, ice, dry ice, or frozen gel packs can be used to keep time/temperature controlled for safety (TCS) foods at 41°F or below. Moving refrigerated food to a walk-in freezer or obtaining a refrigerated truck are other options to keep food safe.

Establishments with more than one licensed establishment are advised to move TCS foods to the working mechanical refrigeration/freezer units of those establishments until power is restored. Food should not be transferred to private homes.

What to Discard

The following foods in refrigerators and freezers should be discarded if temperatures rise above 41°F.

- Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and egg substitutes (raw or cooked)
- Milk, butter, cream and soft cheese
- Casseroles, stews or soups
- Lunch meats and hot dogs
- Whipped Butter
- Cut Melons
- Cooked vegetables
- All other time/temperature controlled for safety (TCS) foods

What to Save

The following foods may be kept at room temperature a few days although food quality may be affected.

- Margarine
- Hard and processed cheeses
- Fresh uncut fruits and vegetables
- Fresh herbs and spices
- Fruit pies, breads, rolls, and muffins
- Flour and nuts

When Power is Restored

- Check the internal food temperatures using a food thermometer and record the temperature.
- Identify and discard TCS foods that are above 41°F.
- ***When in doubt, throw it out!***