

Food Safety for Operators During a Power Outage

A power outage can make food unsafe to eat due to lack of refrigeration. Power outages may be short-term (e.g.: rotating blackouts) or long-term (e.g., emergency, extreme weather, planned interruption, equipment failure).

As an owner/operator of a food premises, you are responsible for complying with Ontario Regulation 493/17: Food Premises to ensure the safety of the food you serve. Food preparation is not recommended during a power outage due to the lack of food safety control measures (i.e. hot water, temperature control and proper lighting). A lack of electricity in a food premises could result in a possible health hazard and may result in the closure of your food premises by a Public Health Inspector.

The following practices will help reduce food spoilage and prevent potential foodborne illness during a power outage:

FREEZER

- Without power, a full freezer will keep food frozen for approximately two days. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen for one day.
- Keep the freezer door closed as much as possible to help frozen food last longer. Bags of ice will also help the food stay frozen.
- Foods that have thawed in the freezer may be re-frozen if they still have ice crystals.
- Use a probe thermometer to check internal food temperatures.
- Throw out any hazardous foods such as meat, fish, poultry, eggs and leftovers that have been at temperatures above 4°C (40°F) for more than 2 hours.
- Throw out food items in the freezer that have come in contact with meat juices.

REFRIGERATOR

- Without power, food will be kept cool for four to six hours. Ice can also help keep the fridge's contents cold.
- Keep the fridge door closed as much as possible to help cold food last longer.
- Throw out meat, fish, poultry, eggs and any leftovers that have been out for more than two hours at temperatures above 4°C (40°F).
- Ensure there are accurate thermometers in each refrigerator to monitor the temperature. Use a probe thermometer to check internal food temperatures.
- Discard food items in the refrigerator that have come in contact with raw meat juices.
- Consider using coolers or ice chests with a supply of ice for food storage.

HOT HOLDING

- It is unsafe to put hot foods in the fridge or freezer during a power outage.
- Items that were being held hot before the outage should be discarded if the temperature is below 60°C (140°F) for more than 2 hours.
- Use a probe thermometer to check internal food temperatures.

If in doubt, throw it out!

Safe Water

- Every food premises must be supplied by hot and cold potable water under pressure.
- If your food premises is supplied from municipal water, there should be no concern if water pressure was maintained in the drinking water system.
- If your food premises is supplied from a private well, a power outage will normally cause the water pump and treatment system to stop working.
 - Immediately call the Health Unit at 613-966-5500 to report the adverse water quality incident (AWQI).
 - Once the water pressure returns,
 - if your water supply is treated by an Ultraviolet system (UV), ensure the UV is functioning according to manufacturer's guidelines and flush the drinking water system at the furthest tap before using the water.
 - if your water is disinfected by chlorination, flush the lines and ensure that the free available chlorine is at a minimum 0.05 mg/L before using water.
- All water using devices (e.g., ice machines, coffee machines directly connected to the plumbing, dishwashers, etc.) should be drained, flushed and sanitized in accordance with manufacturer's guidelines prior to reuse.

Ensure the following items are completed before reopening after a power outage:

- All refrigeration units are operating at 4°C (40°F) or lower.
- Hot holding units can maintain foods at 60°C (140°F) or higher.
- Hot and cold potable water under pressure is available.
- Ensure drinking water treatment devices are working as per manufacturer's instructions (where applicable).
- Lighting and ventilation are operable.

References:

[Food and drinking water safety in an emergency](#) (Government of Canada)

[Food safety during and after a power outage](#)

[Food and drinking water safety in an emergency](#)

For more information contact:

South East Health Unit - Environmental Health
179 North Park Street, Belleville, ON K8P 4P1
T: 613-966-5500 or 1-800-267-2803 ext. 677
F: 613-968-1461 TTY: 711 or 1-800-267-6511

We are committed to providing accessible publications, programs and services to all. For assistance please call 613-966-5500; TTY: 711 or email accessibility@hpeph.ca. For more information, please visit www.hpepublichealth.ca.