Bulletin #9003, Safety of Refrigerated Foods After a Power Outage

Safety of Refrigerated Foods After a Power Outage

Prepared by Mahmoud El-Begearmi, Extension specialist, nutrition and food safety.

For information about UMaine Extension programs and resources, visit extension.umaine.edu.

Find more of our publications and books at extensionpubs.umext.maine.edu.

All chopped meats, poultry and seafood sandwich fillings should not be left without refrigeration for more than two hours. If you have to leave your home without an ice chest containing ice, take cold ingredients to mix and eat as soon as you arrive. If any is left over, throw it away.

Do not trust your sense of smell. Food may be unsafe, even if it doesn’t smell bad.

You can extend your food supply by cooking all unspoiled meat immediately. Cooked meat needs to be kept above 140 degrees F if it cannot be cooled below 40 degrees F within two hours. A food thermometer will help you check food temperatures.

Here are some tips on popular perishable foods.

- **Large, solid, unbound pieces of fresh beef or lamb**, such as rump roast or leg of lamb, are least susceptible to quick spoilage.
- **Uncured sausage** is vulnerable to contamination because it is free of preservatives. Keep it frozen as long as possible, then cook before it completely thaws.
- **Raw chopped meats, like hamburger**, spoil quickly. Pork, fish and poultry spoil quickly, too. Dispose of these foods if they have been in a well-insulated, good working refrigerator without power for 12 hours or more. Do not trust your sense of smell. Food may be unsafe, even if it doesn’t smell bad.
- **Hard cheese** usually keeps well at room temperatures. Other cheeses, such as cream cheese, opened containers of cheese spreads and cottage cheese, spoil quickly. Throw them out when an off-flavor or unusual mold develops.
- **Milk** spoils quickly without refrigeration. Throw out spoiled milk. Soured milk may be used in baking.
- **Custard, gravies, creamed foods, chopped meats, poultry, and seafood sandwich fillings** spoil quickly when unrefrigerated. They are ideal growing places for organisms that can make you sick. Dispose of these foods if they have warmed to over 40 degrees or room temperatures. Spoilage is hard to detect since they may not smell or taste bad.
- **Commercially made baked goods with cream fillings** are not safe if unrefrigerated. Keep them cold, and eat as quickly as possible.
- **Accidentally frozen canned goods** can present health problems. If they are merely swollen—and you
are sure the swelling was caused by freezing—the cans may still be usable. Let the can thaw in the
refrigerator before opening it. If the product does not look or smell normal, throw it out. Do not taste it!
However, if the food does look and smell normal, thoroughly cook it by boiling for 10 to 20 minutes right
away. But if the seams have rusted or burst, throw the cans out immediately.

Source: “Safety of Refrigerated Foods After a Power Failure,” University of Florida Institute of Food and
Agricultural Sciences, 1997.

Information in this publication is provided purely for educational purposes. No responsibility is assumed for any
problems associated with the use of products or services mentioned. No endorsement of products or companies is
intended, nor is criticism of unnamed products or companies implied.

© 1998, 2010

Published and distributed in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of Congress of May 8 and June
30, 1914, by the University of Maine and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Cooperative
Extension and other agencies of the USDA provide equal opportunities in programs and employment. Call 800-
287-0274 or TDD 800-287-8957 (in Maine), or 207-581-3188, for information on publications and
program offerings from University of Maine Cooperative Extension, or visit extension.umaine.edu.

The University of Maine does not discriminate on the grounds of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation,
including transgender status and gender expression, national origin, citizenship status, age, disability, genetic
information or veteran’s status in employment, education, and all other programs and activities. The following
person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies: Director, Office of Equal
Opportunity, 101 North Stevens Hall, 581-1226.