

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

Safety of Refrigerated Foods After a Power Outage

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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.

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