

**Madison County Health Department
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Guidelines For Food Safety at Restaurants During Power Outages

Section 750.120 b) of the Illinois Food Code States:

“In the event of a fire, flood, power outage, or similar event that might result in the contamination of food, or that might prevent potentially hazardous food from being held at required temperatures, the person in charge shall immediately contact the regulatory authority. Upon receiving notice of this occurrence, the regulatory authority shall take whatever action that it deems necessary to protect the public health.”

Appropriate decision-making is critical. Initially, immediate measures must be taken to determine what food is safe to keep or must be discarded. Considerations for whether or not a facility continues operation is primary to prevent unnecessary threats to public health and safety. However, other factors that may influence this decision include:

- Potential liability regarding foodborne illness associated with the mishandling of food during abnormal conditions
- Minimizing product loss due to continued use of inoperable refrigeration units
- Potential liability associated with consumer and employee exposure to unsafe, dark or low light conditions
- Loss of customer confidence due to compromised service and food quality

Handling Food During a Power Outage

Food held in refrigerators or freezers may be unsafe when the power goes out, but loss of power does not always mean loss of food. Generally, food in the refrigerator is safe as long as the power outage is of short duration. Food can be held for a few hours if the following recommendations are followed:

- Keep the doors closed to maintain coldest temperatures, while power is off.
- Consider transporting potentially hazardous foods to an approved operational cold storage facility (such as a facility not affected by a power loss, or a refrigeration truck or ice storage).
- Extend storage life of high risk foods by using clean, uncontaminated ice and/or dry ice if doors must be reopened. Re-close doors.

You cannot rely on appearance or odor to tell you if a food will make you sick.

Recommendations for potentially hazardous foods are:

- Identify foods that have been in the danger zone (between 41-140°F) and discard as necessary.
- Check foods with a probe thermometer to insure proper temperature maintenance has not been compromised (sanitize the thermometer with an alcohol swab or chlorine solution after each use.)
- Do not re-freeze thawed food.

Prior to Reopening, Ensure That:

- Hot (minimum 120°F) and cold potable water under pressure are available.
- Verify that all power breakers have been properly reset as needed (especially at the hot water heater and automatic gas supply solenoid).
- Handwashing facilities are fully operable.
- Toilet facilities are fully operable.
- Electricity and natural gas (if applicable) services are available.
- Refrigeration and/or freezer units are fully operable and capable of maintaining food temperatures (41°F or below for refrigeration units; food in a solid state for freezers.)
- Hot food holding units re capable of maintaining food temperatures at 140°F or above.
- Adequate and approved ventilation for gas-powered equipment are operable.
- Proper dishwashing and sanitizing of multi-use utensils are available.
- Adequate and approved lighting are available.
- All food can be protected from contamination.
- All potentially hazardous food out of temperature are discarded properly.
- Foods that were subsequently thawed in freezer units are not re-frozen.

All food facilities must be in compliance with the Madison County Health Department prior to reopening. If your facility was closed by the Environmental health Officer, you must remain closed until you obtain approval to reopen.