

# Food Safety during Power Outages

Sudden power outages can be frustrating and troublesome, especially when they are prolonged. Perishable foods should not be held above 40 degrees F. for more than 2 hours. If a power outage is 2 hours or less, you need not be concerned, but how do you save your food when the refrigerator is out for longer times? Being prepared can help. By planning ahead, you can save your perishables.

## What do I need?

- One or more coolers. Inexpensive Styrofoam coolers can do an excellent job as well.
- Shelf-stable foods, such as canned goods and powdered or boxed milk. These can be eaten cold or heated on the grill.
- A digital quick-response thermometer. A digital thermometer should be a necessity in your kitchen anyway. With these thermometers you can quickly check the internal temperatures of food for doneness and safety.



## What to do...

- Do not open the refrigerator or freezer. Tell your little ones not to open the door. An unopened refrigerator will keep foods cold enough for a couple of hours at least. A freezer that is half full will hold for up to 24 hours and a full freezer for 48 hours.
- If it looks like the power outage will be for more than 2-4 hours, pack refrigerated milk, dairy products, meats, fish, poultry, eggs, gravy, stuffing and left-overs into your cooler surrounded by ice.
- If it looks like the power outage will be prolonged, prepare a cooler with ice for your freezer items.
- Buy **dry or block ice** to keep the refrigerator as cold as possible if the power is going to be out for a prolonged period of time. Fifty pounds of dry ice should hold an 18-cubic foot fully-stocked freezer cold for two days.

**What should be discarded after a power outage?** As soon as the power returns, check temperatures. If the food in the freezer has ice crystals and is not above 40 degrees F. you can refreeze. Perishable foods in the refrigerator should not be above 40 degrees F. for more than two hours.

- If you plan to eat refrigerated or frozen meat, poultry, fish or eggs while it is still at safe temperatures, it's important that each item is **thoroughly cooked to the proper temperature** to assure that any foodborne bacteria that may be present is destroyed. However, if at any point the food was above 40 ° F for 2 hours or more — discard it.

\*\*Keep in mind that perishable food such as meat, poultry, seafood, milk, and eggs that are **not kept adequately refrigerated or frozen** may cause illness if consumed, even when they are thoroughly cooked.

Call the Wheeling Health Officer at 847-499-9045 if you have any questions.

