



Consumer Protection fact sheet:

FOOD SAFETY DURING TEMPORARY POWER OUTAGES

This document may serve as a guideline for most situations encountered during power outages. The local environmental health agency is primarily responsible for enforcing the California Uniform Retail Food Facilities Law, and shall determine appropriate actions to be taken based on local conditions. The department recommends that food retailers develop a plan and obtain appropriate emergency supplies before the need arises.

The food items of concern are those that are **potentially hazardous foods** (PHF). Potentially hazardous foods are moist, perishable foods in and on which bacteria can grow most easily during the time when the food is held in the temperature danger zone (41° F to 135° F).

When power outage occurs:

- Note the time at which the power outage begins.
- Discard food products that are in the process of being cooked, but which have not yet reached the final temperature.

Actions that can keep food safe for several hours:

Cold PHF

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- If practical, group packages of cold food together to reduce heat gain.
- Cover open refrigerated and frozen food cases, especially vertical displays
- *Caution: The use of dry ice may result in unsafe build-up of CO₂ (Carbon Dioxide)*

Hot PHF

- Do not place hot foods in refrigerators or freezers.
- Use "canned heat" under foods on electric steam tables to help maintain PHF at 135° F.
- Use ice and/or ice baths to rapidly cool small batches of hot food.

Discontinue food preparation if any of the following conditions exist:

- Inability to properly wash, rinse and sanitize utensils.
- Inoperative hood ventilation and make-up air supply systems in conjunction with gas or solid fuel heating and cooking equipment (***Danger: Toxic fumes may cause injury or death.***)
- Lack of sufficient light in food preparation areas to allow for safe food preparation and cleaning and sanitizing of food contact surfaces.
- No hot water, inadequate water pressure.
- Unsafe food temperatures.

When power is restored:

- Identify those PHF that may have been in the temperature danger zone.
- Check the internal food temperature.
- If practical, separate packages of food in refrigeration units and freezers to allow for faster re-cooling.

Reopening

If you voluntarily closed your facility, the following conditions should be verified prior to resuming food preparation and/or sale of potentially hazardous foods:

1. All unsafe PHF has been discarded - if there are any questions regarding the safety of specific foods, contact your local environmental health agency or your food health inspector.
2. Electricity and gas services have been restored.
3. All circuit breakers have been properly reset as needed.
4. All equipment and facilities are operating properly, including: lighting, refrigeration, hot holding, ventilation, toilet facilities, hot water (minimum 120° F) and cold potable water, (under pressure for hand washing and/or proper dishwashing).

If your facility was closed by a local environmental health agency, it must remain closed until you obtain official approval from that agency to reopen.

Disposal of food:

- PHF that has been subjected to temperature abuse prior to the power outage might not be safe to eat even if the procedures in the tables on the previous page are followed. **WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**
- If it is determined that food must be discarded, document the type and amount of food and the reason for disposal for insurance and regulatory purposes.
- Small volumes of food to be discarded can be denatured with a cleaning product (such as bleach) and placed in the outside refuse bin.
- To discard large volumes of food, contact your refuse disposal company or your local landfill operator for disposal instructions.
- If there are any questions regarding the safety of specific foods, contact your local environmental health agency.