

# Food Safety in a Power Outage



Perishable foods should not be held above 40°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 metal-stem thermometer. A thermometer should be a necessity in your kitchen anyway. With a thermometer, you can quickly check the internal temperatures of food for doneness and safety.

### What should I do?

- Do not open the refrigerator or freezer. 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.

### What if I go to bed and the power is still not on?

Before you go to bed, pack your perishables into your coolers if you haven't already done so and put in as much ice as you can. Also, when you go to bed, leave a bedroom light switched on. When the power goes back on, it will wake you, so you can check the condition of your foods in the freezer.

### What if the power goes out while I'm at work or out of the house and it has been more than a few hours before I get home?

Try to determine how long the power has been out. Check the internal temperature of the food in your refrigerator with your thermometer. A liquid such as milk or juice is easy to check. Spot check other items like steaks or left-overs also. If the internal temperature is above 40°F, it is best to throw it out.

### What if the power goes out and comes back on while I am out?

If your freezer is fairly full and you know it was not longer than 24 hours, the food should be OK. There will be loss of quality with refreezing, but the food will be safe. If the refrigerator was out for more than 2 – 4 hours, it is best to discard the perishables.

### 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°F you can refreeze. Perishable foods in the refrigerator should not be above 40°F for more than two hours. Use the chart below and on the back for help determine what to keep and what to discard.

FROZEN FOODS	Still contains ice crystals. Not above 40°F.	Thawed. Held above 40°F over 2 hours.
<b>Meat and Mixed Dishes:</b>		
Beef, veal, lamb, pork, poultry, ground meat	Refreeze	Discard
Casseroles with meat, pasta, rice, egg or cheese base, stews, soups, convenience foods, pizza	Refreeze	Discard
Fish, shellfish, breaded seafood products	Refreeze	Discard
<b>Dairy:</b>		
Milk, eggs/egg products, soft cheese, cream cheese	Refreeze	Discard
Hard cheese (cheddar/parmesan), processed cheese	Refreeze	Refreeze
Ice cream, frozen yogurt	Discard	Discard

<b>FROZEN FOODS, continued</b>	<b>Still contains ice crystals. Not above 40°F.</b>	<b>Thawed. Held above 40°F over 2 hours.</b>
<b>Fruits and Vegetables:</b>		
Fruit juices, home or commercially packaged fruit	Refreeze.	Refreeze. Discard if moldy, yeasty smell or slimy.
Vegetable juices, home or commercially packaged or blanched vegetables	Refreeze	Discard if above 50° F over 8 hours.
<b>Baked Goods/Baking Ingredients:</b>		
Fruit juices, flour, cornmeal, nuts, bread dough	Refreeze	Refreeze
Pie crusts, breads, rolls, muffins, cakes	Refreeze	Discard if above 50° F over 8 hours.
Pies/pastries with custard or cheese filling, cheesecake	Refreeze	Discard

<b>REFRIGERATED FOODS</b>	<b>Food still cold. Held above 40°F under 2 hours.</b>	<b>Held above 40°F over 2 hours.</b>
<b>Dairy/Eggs/Cheese:</b>		
Milk, cream, sour cream, yogurt, baby formula (opened)	Keep	Discard
Eggs, egg dishes, custards, puddings	Keep	Discard
Soft cheeses, cottage cheese	Keep	Discard
Hard cheese, processed cheese, butter, margarine	Keep	Keep
<b>Fruits &amp; Vegetables:</b>		
Fruit juice, canned fruits, fresh fruits, fresh vegetables	Keep	Keep
Cooked vegetables, vegetable juice (opened)	Keep	Discard after 6 hours
Baked potatoes, garlic (chopped in oil or butter)	Keep	Discard
<b>Meat, Poultry, Seafood:</b>		
Fresh or leftover meat, poultry, fish, or seafood	Keep	Discard
Lunchmeats, hot dogs, bacon, sausage, dried beef	Keep	Discard
Canned meats (opened or labeled "keep refrigerated")	Keep	Discard
<b>Mixed Dishes, Side Dishes:</b>		
Casseroles, stuffing, gravy, soups, stews, pizza	Keep	Discard
Meat, tuna, shrimp, chicken, or egg salad	Keep	Discard
Cooked pasta, pasta salads with mayonnaise	Keep	Discard
<b>Pies, Breads:</b>		
Cream or cheese filled pastries and pies	Keep	Discard
Fruit pies, breads, rolls, cakes, muffins, quick breads	Keep	Keep
Refrigerator biscuits, rolls, cookie dough	Keep	Discard
<b>Sauces, Spreads, Jams:</b>		
Mayonnaise, tartar sauce, horseradish	Keep	Discard
Salad dressing, jelly, relish, BBQ sauce, mustard, ketchup, olives	Keep	Keep

**Remember: When in doubt, *throw it out!***

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**Washtenaw County Department of Planning & Environment**

705 N. Zeeb Rd. Ann Arbor, MI 48107-8645 (734) 222-3800 [www.eWashtenaw.org](http://www.eWashtenaw.org)

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