



# Food Safety & Nutrition

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## What to do with Food When the Power Goes Out!

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Well the ice and snow storm of 2004 will be memorable for us all in one way or another. A common question I am getting today is from those of you who had power outages and what to do with the food in your refrigerators or freezers. This information may come a little late, but maybe it will help evaluate the food you did have in the freezer or help you (sigh!) the next time power goes out. Hopefully that won't be too soon!!!

Foods that are refrigerated or frozen will stay cold or frozen for some time in their units if they are not opened much. So when the power goes out don't run to the refrigerator and open it several times. Think about what you want from it, grab the items quickly and close the door. Also the fuller the refrigerator or freezer is the longer the food items will stay cold or frozen.

Refrigerated food should be safe as long as power is out no more than 4 hours. Keep the door closed as much as possible. Discard any perishable foods (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and leftovers) that have been above 40 °F for 2 hours.

If service is not resumed to the freezer within two days, use 2 ½ pounds of dry ice per cubic food capacity of the freezer to prevent deterioration or spoilage of the frozen foods. This quantity of dry ice should hold the freezer temperature below freezing for two to three days.

So, now what about food that was in a freezer. What can be kept and what needs to be thrown away? Don't let the food that has thawed to refreeze without you checking out the condition of the food first. Refreezing of food is a safe practice if the food has not warmed to above 40° F.

**Never taste food to determine its safety!** You will have to evaluate each item separately. If an appliance thermometer was kept in the freezer, read the temperature when the power comes back on. If the appliance thermometer stored in the freezer reads 40 °F or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen. If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine the safety. Remember you can't rely on appearance or odor. If the food still contains ice crystals or is 40 °F or below, it is safe to refreeze. There will, however, be a quality loss with the thawing and refreezing.

In general discard foods that have been warmer than 40° F for more than 2 hours. Discard any foods that have been contaminated by raw meat juices. Dispose of soft or melted ice cream for quality's sake. Foods that are alright to keep if above 40 F for more than 2 hours include: hard and processed cheeses; margarines; fresh fruits; opened fruit juices; jams & jellies; relish; taco, barbecue & soy sauce; mustard; catsup; olives, vinegar based dressings; and raw vegetables.

For a chart on what to do with foods in a freezer when power goes out contact the WSU Extension office at 397-6060 ext.0. It can be sent to you or emailed to you easily.