



Rhode Island Department of Health
Office of Food Protection

www.health.ri.gov
(401) 222-2750

Food Business Guidelines for Food Safety During Temporary Power Outages

Appropriate decision-making before, during, and immediately after power outages is necessary to protect consumers from unsafe food and minimize product loss. The Department recommends that food retailers develop a plan and obtain appropriate emergency supplies before the need arises. For example, if you think that you might lose power, turn the refrigerator and freezer to the coldest setting.

The food items of concern are those that are potentially hazardous foods (PHF). Generally, PHF 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).

A POWER OUTAGE OF 2 HOURS OR LESS IS NOT CONSIDERED HAZARDOUS TO FOOD THAT IS HELD UNDER SAFE CONDITIONS WHEN THE OUTAGE BEGINS.

WHEN THERE IS A POWER OUTAGE...

- Note the time at which the power outage begins.

ACTIONS THAT CAN KEEP FOOD SAFE FOR SEVERAL HOURS

Cold Potentially Hazardous Foods	Hot Potentially Hazardous Foods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Do not place hot foods in refrigerators or freezers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ If practical, group packages of cold food together to reduce heat gain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Use "canned heat" under foods on electric steam tables to help maintain PHF at 135°F or above
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Cover open refrigerated and frozen food cases, especially vertical displays 	

Caution: The use of dry ice for cooling foods may result in an unsafe build-up of CO₂ (Carbon Dioxide).

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 (See tables on page 2)

WHEN THE POWER IS RESTORED

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

Use the following to determine the disposition of PHF:

REFRIGERATED PHF

Use the table below as a guide for handling PHF stored in refrigeration units during power outages:

Duration of Power Outage (hours)	Food Temperature		
	45° F or below	46° F to 50° F	50° F or above
0-2	PHF can be sold	Immediately cool PHF To 41° F or below within 2 hours	<i>PHF cannot be sold</i>
2-3	PHF can be sold, but must be cooled to 41° F or below within 2 hours	Immediately cool PHF to 41° F or below within 1 hour	
4+	Immediately cool PHF to 41° F or below within 1 hour	<i>PHF cannot be sold</i>	

PHF IN HOT HOLDING UNITS

Use the following table to determine what to do with PHF that is held in hot holding units and is below 135° F at the time the power is restored:

Duration of Power Outage	Food below 135 F in Hot Holding Units When Power is Restored
2 hours or less	1. May be sold if reheated to 165° F and then held at 135° F or above; or 2. May be sold if rapidly cooled to 41° F or below within 2 hours following restoration of power.
More than 2 hours	Cannot be sold

If food cannot be rapidly cooled as specified in the tables above, it cannot be sold.

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 potentially hazardous food has been discarded
 - ❑ If there are any questions regarding the safety of specific foods, contact the RI

Department of Health at 222-2750.

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
5. Hot and cold potable water, under pressure for:
 - ❑ Hand washing
 - ❑ Proper dishwashing

If your facility was closed by the Rhode Island Department of Health, 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 the RI Department of Health Office of Food Protection.

This document may serve as a guideline for most situations encountered during power outages. If you have any questions contact the Rhode Island Department of Health.

Adapted from: State of California
Department of Health Services
Food and Drug Branch