EOHU Eastern Ontario Health Unit BSEO Bureau de santé de l'est de l'Ontario

Food and Water Safety During and After an Emergency

Handling refrigerated and frozen food during a power failure

- Freezing stops the growth of bacteria. Do not open the refrigerator or freezer door unless absolutely necessary in order to maintain the cold temperature.
  - A full freezer will keep food frozen for about 48 hours. A freezer that is half full will keep food frozen for about 24 hours.
  - An unopened refrigerator will keep food cold for about 4 hours.
  - If available, add ice to the refrigerator to keep the food at a safe temperature if the power will be out for long periods of time.
- Do not place frozen food outside, even in winter. The sun's rays could thaw frozen food even when the outdoor temperature is very cold, and animals could contaminate your food.
- If you know that a power failure will last for a long period of time, see if you can take the food to a friend nearby who has power.

Handling refrigerated and frozen food after a power failure

- Discard any thawed food that has been at room temperature for two or more hours, and any food that has an obvious unusual colour or odour. Keep in mind that food contaminated with bacteria does not necessarily smell bad or appear spoiled. **When in doubt, throw it out.**
- Food that still contains ice crystals or feels refrigerator-cold can be re-frozen.
- If raw food has leaked during thawing, clean and disinfect the areas the food has touched. Do not reuse the cloths you have used for clean-up until they have been disinfected by washing in hot water.

Safe handling of food and water

- Listen to local authorities to determine if tap water is safe to use. If the water is not safe to use, follow instructions to use bottled water, or to boil or disinfect water for cooking, cleaning, and bathing.
- Do not use contaminated water to:
  - brush your teeth
  - make baby formula
  - make ice
  - wash and prepare food
  - wash dishes
  - wash your hands
- Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with:
  - animal waste
  - chemicals
  - extraneous materials
  - floodwater
  - snow and ice
  - soil and dirt

002-0027e HH-10138-H (17)

- If buying food at the grocery store, or eating out, ask retailers and restaurateurs to explain how food has been kept safe during a power failure.
- Check the condition of stored food and throw away any containers that have been damaged or are past their "best before" date. Can or container damage is shown by:
    - crushing/denting that prevents normal stacking or opening
    - deep rusting
    - holes
    - leakage
    - punctures
    - swelling
- Food containers that are **not** waterproof and could have come into contact with floodwater should be thrown away. These include containers with:
    - pull tops
    - screw-caps
    - snap lids
- If the following items have come into contact with floodwater or hazardous material, they should be thrown away because they cannot be sanitized properly.
    - baby formula containers
    - cardboard juice containers
    - home-canned foods
    - milk containers

Cleaning and drying stored food and food surfaces after a flood

Only undamaged, commercially-prepared foods in sealed, unopened, airtight, waterproof cans, jars or pouches are entirely safe to use. However, these cans and/or pouches must be carefully inspected, cleaned and disinfected before use by following these procedures:

1. If possible, remove the labels on cans or pouches since they could have come into contact with dirt or bacteria. Be sure to re-label your cans or pouches, including the ""best before"" date, with a permanent marker.
2. After labels are removed, cans can be cleaned by washing them for two minutes with a mild bleach solution - 5 ml (or 1 tsp) of bleach per 750 ml (or 3 cups) of water.
3. Air-dry all cleaned food cans, jars and pouches to prevent potential contamination when the containers are opened.

Food preparation equipment, surfaces, dishes and utensils should be properly sanitized with a mild bleach solution. It is important to allow equipment, surfaces, dishes and utensils to air dry thoroughly before storing. Do not put one wet cutting board on top of another, because bacteria can multiply in trapped water.

Source: *Food Safety in an Emergency* (www.inspection.gc.ca)

002-0027e HH-10138-H (17)