

Keeping Refrigerated and Frozen Foods Safe During An Outage

Osage Valley always strives to bring our members reliable electricity, but occasionally major storms may cause a prolonged outage situation. While this can be very stressful, being prepared can help ease the anxiety and get you through the outage.

The main factor in keeping food safe is keeping it at the proper temperature. Keeping a thermometer in your refrigerator and freezer will assure that your appliances are maintaining the proper temperatures. A properly working refrigerator should maintain a temperature below 40° F and a freezer should maintain a temperature below 0°F.

During a power outage refrigerated food will remain chilled for up to 4 to 6 hours. Do not open the refrigerator door any more than absolutely necessary. If you think the power will be out longer than 4 to 6 hours, place large bowls of ice in the refrigerator to keep the temperature cool longer. Having a thermometer in your refrigerator will show if your refrigerator is maintaining a safe temperature during the power outage.

Foods in your freezer will remain frozen for an even longer period of time. If your freezer is full and not opened during the power outage, the food will remain frozen for up to 2 days. If the freezer is only half full, food may stay frozen only 1 day. Make sure your freezer is well sealed. Leaky gaskets can shorten the amount of time your food will stay frozen. Also the size of the freezer can affect the length of time the food will stay frozen. The bigger the freezer, the longer the food will last. Deeper chest freezers will stay frozen longer than upright freezers.

When your refrigerator and freezer are working again, evaluate the safety of the affected food. With frozen food consider the type of food and the extent of thawing. For refrigerated food consider the temperature inside the refrigerator before the return of power, the type of food, and the time these foods have been stored above 40 ° F. Use the tables below to determine which foods may safely be kept and which ones should be thrown out.

FROZEN FOODS	Partially Frozen (some ice crystals)	Completely Thawed, Still Cold (below 40° F)	Completely Thawed, Warm (above 40°)
Meats (beef, veal, pork, lamb)	Refreeze	Cook and Serve Or Cook and Refreeze	Discard
Poultry	Refreeze	Cook and Serve Or Cook and Refreeze	Discard
Organ Meats (liver, kidney, heart)	Use Within 48 Hours Do Not Refreeze	Cook and Serve	Discard
Fish and Shellfish	Refreeze	Cook and Serve Or Cook and Refreeze	Discard
Combination Dishes (Stews, casseroles, meat pies)	Cook and Serve Or Cook and Refreeze*	Cook and Serve	Discard
Dairy Items (cream, butter, cheese)	Refreeze	Refreeze Or Refrigerate	Discard
Produce (vegetables or fruit)	Refreeze	Cook and Serve Or Cook and Refreeze	Discard
Juices	Refreeze	Refreeze	Discard
Breads	Refreeze	Refreeze	Serve
Fruit Pies	Refreeze	Refreeze	Discard
Plain Cakes	Refreeze	Refreeze	Serve

***Refreeze only dishes containing raw ingredients. Do not refreeze previously cooked dishes.**

REFRIGERATED FOODS	
Milk	Discard if held above 40° F over two hours.
Fruit juices	Generally safe unrefrigerated until power returns, but discard if cloudy, moldy, or fermented
Eggs, fresh or hard boiled	Discard if held above 40° F over two hours.
Hard cheeses, butter, margarine	Generally safe unrefrigerated if well wrapped, but discard if mold or rancid odor develops
Fresh fruits and vegetables	Generally safe unrefrigerated until power returns, but discard if mold, yeasty odor or slimy texture develops.
Fresh meats and poultry	Discard if held above 40° F over two hours.
Lunch meats and hot dogs	Discard if held above 40° F over two hours.
Mayonnaise (opened)	Discard if held above 40° F over two hours.
Opened containers of jelly, jam mustard, ketchup, pickles and olives	Safe unrefrigerated until power returns.

Remember: When in doubt, throw it out!