

Frequently Asked Food Safety Questions Part Two

What should be done with refrigerated/frozen foods after a power outage or appliance failure?

Answer: Freezer failure can mean the loss of a large investment in food, time and money. A freezer may fail at any time of the year due to power outages, mechanical problems, accidental unplugging or the door left open.

When you first notice that your freezer has stopped, try to determine the cause. It might be something simple like a blown fuse, a shortage in the electrical circuit or an accidental disconnection. Restore normal operation as quickly as possible and check the food for thawing.

If your freezer has failed due to mechanical problems, read the instruction manual to see if there is something you can do to get it back into operation. If not, you will need to call a repairman for service.

What should be done with thawed food?

Answer: Some thawed food can be refrozen. However; the quality of the food will not be as good. Other foods may need to be discarded. Here are some guidelines:

- Meat, Poultry, Shellfish, Vegetables, Creamed Foods, Puddings, Cream Pies and Cooked Foods: Re-freeze only if ice crystals are still present or if the freezer temperature stays 40°F or below and if the color and odor are good. Check each package, and discard if any signs of spoilage such as an off color or off odor are present. Discard any packages that are above 40°F (or at room temperature).
- Fruits: Re-freeze if they show no sign of spoilage. Thawed fruits may be used in cooking or making jellies, jams, or preserves. Fruits survive thawing with the least damage to quality.
- Ice Cream: If partially thawed, throw it out. The texture of ice cream is not acceptable after thawing. If its temperature rises 40°F, it could be unsafe.
- Breads, Nuts Doughnuts, Cookies and Cakes: These foods re-freeze better than most. They can be safely re-frozen if they show no signs of mold growth.

What should be done if your freezer will not be operating within the day?

Answer: First, check into moving your frozen food to a freezer that is working. If you need to move food a distance, put it in insulated boxes or between thick layers of newspapers and blankets.

When the power goes out, unplug the freezer and refrigerator, as well as other appliances, to protect them from electricity surges when power returns. Make sure everyone in your household knows not to open the refrigerator or freezer doors; keeping the doors closed will keep the food cold for a longer period of time. Wrap the

refrigerator/freezer in blankets, making sure they don't touch the compressor, to create extra insulation. If it seems that the power will be off for more than 2 to 4 hours, re-pack refrigerated items into coolers with plenty of ice.

Items in the freezer potentially can stay frozen for 2 to 4 days, depending on the size of the freezer, how full it is, and how well insulated it is. A full freezer that had been operating at 0°F will keep foods frozen for about 48 hours if the door remains closed; a half-full one can only be expected to keep food frozen for a maximum of 24 hours. For extended power outages use blocks of dry ice in the freezer. A fifty pound block of dry ice will keep the contents of a full 18 cubic foot freezer frozen for 2 days.

Dry ice is very cold. Handle it carefully and always wear heavy gloves to prevent the ice from burning your hand. When you buy dry ice, have it cut into small enough sizes to use. Do not try to cut or chip it yourself. Ask the dry ice company to wrap each piece in newspaper for you. A 50-pound block of dry ice is enough to protect frozen food in a full 20-cubic freezer for three to four days. A 25-pound block should hold the temperature of a half-full, 10-cubic foot freezer for two to three days.

When the power does return, check the internal temperatures of all of your perishable foods with a calibrated food thermometer. Discard any perishable food that has been above 40°F for more than 2 hours as described above. Source of information: National Center for Home Food Preservation <http://www.uga.edu/nchfp>

My freezer is only partially full. Should I fill the space with something?

Answer: A full freezer turns on less and costs less to run. Fill the freezer with gallon jugs of water instead of leaving it partly full. In case of a power outage, the frozen jugs will keep the freezer cold longer and prevent food from thawing. When you need more space, just remove a jug. Reminder: Don't fill the jugs too full. Water expands as it freezes.