



POWER OUTAGE PREPAREDNESS

Post Fire Re-Entry Guidance

The Department of Public Health (DPH) knows that power outages have an impact on food operations. Therefore, DPH has provided this tool for food operators which will assist in planning for and responding to power outages. Making the correct decisions before, during, and after a power outage is important to ensure customer safety and minimize food loss.



BE PREPARED

To prepare your food facility for potential power outages due to rolling blackouts or high fire danger, consider the following actions:

- Obtain a generator with sufficient capacity for essential equipment like refrigeration and lighting.
- Ensure you have enough functional refrigerators and probe thermometers.
- Know sources for block ice.
- Have sufficient ice chests to keep food cold.
- Identify an alternative approved cold-storage facility, such as one not affected by outages or a refrigeration truck.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

In addition to protecting public health and safety, the following additional factors should be considered when planning for, or responding to, a power outage:

- Potential liability from foodborne illness associated with the mishandling of food during abnormal conditions.
- Potential liability when customers and employees are exposed to unsafe, dark, or low light conditions.
- Increased product loss (spoilage and waste) due to repeated opening of non-working refrigeration units.
- Loss of customer confidence due to inferior service and food quality.



WHEN A POWER OUTAGE OCCURS

- Write down the start time of the power outage and regularly check food temperatures to ensure they remain outside of the **temperature danger zone**.
- Refer to the **Be Prepared** section for the steps to take.
- A power outage of 2 hours or less is not considered hazardous to food that was being held under safe conditions when the outage began.
- Take steps to keep food at safe temperatures, especially if the outage will last longer than 2 hours.



OPERATING DURING A POWER OUTAGE

To ensure food safety and protect the public's health, all food facilities must be able to provide:

- Hot running water.
- Foods that are at the proper temperatures by using refrigerators, freezers, and hot-holding units.
- Hot-holding units at 135°F or above.
- Working hood ventilation system and make-up air vent for gas equipment.
- Multi-use customer and kitchen utensils that are washed and sanitized.
- Enough lighting in the food preparation area and the restrooms.

If your food facility cannot provide the requirements above, you should **voluntarily close** your food facility and reopen as soon as power is back on and are able to meet the requirements. (**See Re-Opening Guidelines.**)

If you cannot meet the above requirements and DPH observes that your food facility has remained open, you will be directed to close your facility at once. You will not be allowed to re-open until given approval to do so.



HANDLING FOOD DURING A POWER OUTAGE

Power outages can jeopardize refrigerated or frozen food, but it doesn't always mean food is spoiled. With proper precautions, food can remain safe for a few hours. Follow these guidelines:

- **Keep Doors Closed:** Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to maintain cold temperatures.
- **Use Ice:** If available, place clean, sealed bags of ice in the units to help keep temperatures low. **(Caution: Do not use dry ice in enclosed spaces like walk-in units, as it can create unsafe carbon dioxide levels.)**
- **Monitor Temperatures:** Use thermometers in each unit. Built-in digital thermometers may not work during outages. Keep refrigerators at 41°F or below.
- **Group Cold Foods:** Group cold items together to maintain lower temperatures longer, keeping raw meats separate from other foods.
- **Avoid Hot Foods:** Do not place hot foods in refrigerators or freezers, as they will raise the temperature. Rapidly cool hot foods using an ice bath, or discard them.
- **Hot Foods:** Hot foods in steam tables can be kept for a short period. If the outage continues, cool them rapidly in an ice bath or discard them.
- **Cold Storage:** Move potentially hazardous foods to an approved cold storage facility if the outage lasts. Ensure the facility is no more than 30 minutes away if the transport vehicle is not refrigerated.

Do not rely on appearance or smell to judge food safety. If you suspect food has been kept above 41°F for too long, discard it. When in doubt, throw it out.

ONCE THE POWER IS RESTORED ⚡

When power is restored, follow these steps to ensure food safety:

- **Check Temperatures Immediately:** Use a sanitized probe thermometer to check the internal temperature of all potentially hazardous cold and hot foods. Sanitize the thermometer before and after each use.
- **Delayed Return:** If you cannot return immediately, look for signs that food may have reached unsafe temperatures, such as completely melted and refrozen ice (e.g., ice frozen in the shape of the container).
- **Discard Unsafe Foods:** Discard potentially hazardous foods kept above 41°F for more than four hours or with an internal temperature above 50°F.
- **Unmonitored Foods:** If you cannot monitor food temperatures during a long outage, discard the food as a safety precaution.
- **Rearrange Cold Foods:** If cold foods were grouped together to stay cold, spread them out again to cool faster.
- **Do Not Refreeze Thawed Foods:** Do not refreeze thawed items. Discard items like ice cream if thawed. Thawed foods requiring preparation can be moved to a working refrigerator or cooked if they were not in the temperature danger zone.

For any questions regarding these guidelines, please contact Environmental Health at (888) 700-9995 during regular business hours

RE-OPENING GUIDELINES ✓

Before resuming food preparation or sales after a voluntary closure due to a power outage, ensure the following conditions are met:

- **Water Notices:** Do not reopen if a **Boil Water Notice** or **Do Not Drink Notice** is in effect. Take appropriate actions if such notices are issued.
- **Hot and Cold Water:** Ensure hot water (at least 120°F) is available for utensil washing, and warm water (at least 100°F) is available for handwashing.
- **Power Systems:** Verify that all power breakers are reset, especially for the hot water heater and gas supply solenoid.
- **Utility Services:** Confirm that electricity and, if applicable, natural gas services are fully restored.
- **Refrigeration:** Ensure refrigeration units maintain 41°F or below, and freezers keep food in a solid state.
- **Hot Holding Equipment:** Ensure hot holding equipment maintains food at 135°F or above.
- **Ventilation and Lighting:** Check that gas-powered equipment has adequate and approved ventilation, and that proper lighting is available.
- **Food Safety:** Ensure all food is protected from contamination. Discard any potentially hazardous foods that were out of safe temperature ranges or thawed foods that were refrozen.

NOTE: All food facilities must comply with the California Retail Food Code before reopening. **If your facility was closed by the Department of Public Health (DPH), remain closed until you receive approval to reopen.**

