



Power Outage Recovery Tips

Public Health Information Brief

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Background and Summary

Power failures can be critical situations at sites where the environment and public safety are at risk, such as hospitals, restaurants, grocery stores, schools, etc. The interruption of electrical service is an imminent health hazard in any foodservice establishment, particularly because it can hamper a facility's ability to refrigerate and cook foods, as well as sanitize properly.

While the following tips can help you prepare for and recover from a power outage, they are not a replacement for a tested crisis management plan.

Power Outage Preparation

Communications

A clearly outlined communications plan will keep you and your team functioning as a unit during a power outage. Ensure that you have a contingency plan in place for deciding when to close or offer alternate operations (e.g., limited menu or changed shift schedule) and that all employees know their roles. Emergency numbers and contact lists should be available for employees and should include:

- Managers
- Regional/Corporate offices
- Police
- Fire department
- Red Cross
- Electric company
- Gas Utilities
- Water and sewer facilities or government agencies
- Plumber
- Dry ice supplier
- Bottled/Potable water supplier
- Equipment Rental, including refrigerator truck or equipment

Supplies

Emergency preparedness supplies are a good idea to have on hand at all times.

- Flashlights
- Battery-operated radio
- Extra batteries
- Large plastic sheets and cardboard
- First aid supplies
- Bottled water supplies
- Hand sanitizer or wipes
- Non-perishable packaged or canned food
- Blankets and pillows
- Pen and paper

Food Safety in a Power Outage

One of the biggest dangers in a power outage is how it affects food. Temperature abused foods can grow harmful bacteria and spoil, putting people at risk for foodborne illness. Appropriate responses must take place to maintain food safety. Many Time and Temperature Control for Safety (TCS) foods may need to be destroyed if they go out of temperature range.

A closed refrigerator will keep food below 41°F for only a few hours after a power loss. Discard any TCS foods (meats; vacuum packaged meats and products, including those reduced oxygen packaged foods for sous vide and cook-chill; poultry; fish; eggs; cheese; dairy-containing products; cut tomatoes; cut melons; sprouts; etc.) that have been above 41°F for two or more hours. A closed freezer can keep food below 41°F for up to 48 hours if it is full and unopened. Discard any frozen product that has thawed and been above 41°F for two or more hours. If the time about 41°F is unknown, discard temperature abused TCS foods.

While the following tips can help you recover from a power outage, they are not a replacement for a tested crisis management plan.

- Actions that need to happen often depend on the length of a power outage. It may be impossible to determine how long a power outage might last, but location management should take action based on the best information available and the advice of a corporate office/headquarters, if there is one.
- Note the time the power outage begins.
- Only use a mechanical dishwasher or three-compartment sink if hot water is still available, otherwise use single service tableware and discontinue operations that generate soiled utensils/tableware that must be washed.
- Make certain there is a properly working thermometer in your refrigerators and freezers.
- Monitor and document product temperatures in refrigerators every two hours. In open, upright retail refrigerator cases where doors are not available, monitor and document product temperatures every hour.
- Do not put hot food into refrigeration equipment because it will raise the temperature.
- Avoid opening reach-in and walk-in cooler doors as much as possible to keep foods cold. In open upright retail cases where doors are not available, cover the cases with cardboard, plastic or equivalent to retain cold air.
- Create ice baths for TCS foods, such as eggs, meats, seafood, milk, cheese, prepared foods and cooked vegetables to help keep them cold.
 - Dry ice can also help keep refrigeration temperatures at 41°F or below. Be cautious when using dry ice, as it can produce carbon dioxide in closed areas.
 - Relocate product in open cases to walk-in boxes, freezers or refrigerators if safe temperatures cannot be maintained.
 - Keep products close together to help hold temperature.
- Discard any TCS foods or foods that have been above 41°F for more than two hours. Use a calibrated thermometer to test the temperature of foods. If the time and temperature is undetermined, discard the product.
 - Discard any food that smells off, looks off-color or has changed texture. Never taste suspect food items; if food has spoiled or been contaminated, you could make yourself sick.
- Discard any product that was in food prep or cooling process and any food held hot or cold on the line.
 - If placed in a walk-in cooler, products that are in hot holding or in the cooling process may raise the temperature of the cooler itself and could put the safety of items already in the cooler at risk.
- Discard raw animal/TCS foods that were in the cooking or re-heating process and did not reach safe final temperatures.

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- When discarding products, make them unappetizing to anyone that might retrieve them from a dumpster. Remove any logo from the product and pour bleach, detergent, or old shortening over the product to make it unappetizing. Small volumes of discarded food can be placed in an outside refuse bin. To discard large volumes of food, contact a disposal company for immediate transportation to a licensed landfill.
- When restocking the refrigerator, ensure that the refrigerator is 41°F or colder and that the product received is also at 41°F or less.
- Empty and sanitize ice machines and bins and other surfaces that weren't cleaned and sanitized at the time of the power outage. Sanitize refrigerator and freezer shelves if any product has leaked.
- When in doubt, throw it out! Always err on the side of food safety and quality when trying to decide if a product can be salvaged.

Other Power Outage Concerns

In addition to food storage, power outages can create other risks. Pre-planning can help an establishment be prepared to handle these additional dangers.

- If power goes out during business hours and customers are present, personal safety issues could be possible. To prevent slips, trips, falls, and other dangers, escort customers and non-essential employees to a safe location with flashlights or emergency lighting.
- Loss of power could cause water pumps to fail. If water is not available for hand washing, it is imperative to cease operations.
- Exhaust hoods will not operate in the event of a power outage, so all cooking, grilling, and frying should stop. Even if cooking, grilling, and frying is done with gas, an inoperable exhaust hood can lead to a build-up of carbon monoxide, which can be extremely dangerous. Carbon monoxide is odorless, colorless, and tasteless and may be difficult for people to detect.

Government Resources

You may find additional helpful information regarding power outage preparation and recovery at this website:

FoodSafety.gov Emergency Preparedness Website
<http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/emergency/>

Steritech Resources

Steritech can assist you with crisis management planning or power outage recovery, as well as any questions you may have about food safety following a storm. Steritech's Customer Care Center is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 800.868.0089 to assist you with any of your needs.

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