



Tornado Recovery

FOOD AND OPERATIONAL SAFETY

Public Health Information Brief
Updated October 2022



Background and Summary

When tornadoes strike, entire communities are affected. In many instances, restaurants, foodservice operations, and grocery and convenience stores open their doors to feed and assist neighbors. We hope this food and operational safety information can be of assistance to organizations supporting affected areas.

Always follow instructions provided by emergency or public health authorities on site or in your immediate area. The information provided below does not supersede direction provided by experts on the ground in the crisis. Local health authority instructions always take precedence over these guidelines.

Critical rules for safety

Tornadoes, tornado outbreaks, and recovery efforts can create tremendous devastation in a short amount of time. Personal safety and protecting life should always be paramount. That is why it is important to remember these three critical facility operational rules for safety when a tornado alert is issued or when involved in any cleanup operations:

1. Safety should always come first.
2. Do not operate in any facility not cleared by emergency or disaster personnel.
3. Do not use generators, grills, or charcoal-burning devices inside a building.

Preparing for a tornado

Tornado activity can arise quickly and leave little time for action. The best way to prepare is to have a recovery plan established ahead of time so that your organization can take appropriate action following a tornado.

Keep in mind that depending on the damage level, communications may be down and personnel may be unavailable. Having a well-documented plan and training appropriate employees on that plan will ensure that any leader can take action in the event of emergency.

Communication

A clearly outlined communications plan will keep you and your team functioning as a unit following a tornado. 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
- Fire department
- Water and sewer facilities
- Other necessary government or municipal agencies
- Red Cross
- Gas utilities
- Regional/Corporate offices
- Equipment rental, including refrigerator truck or equipment
- Public health authorities
- Electric company
- Dry ice supplier
- Police
- Plumber
- Bottled/Potable water supplier

Supplies

Emergency preparedness supplies are a good idea to have on hand at all times. Tornadoes may necessitate further emergency supplies. Consider having the following items on hand at all times.

- Flashlights
- Battery-operated radio
- Extra batteries
- First aid supplies
- Non-perishable packaged or canned foods
- Bottled water supplies
- Hand sanitizer or wipes
- Plywood for boarding windows
- Blankets and pillows
- Pen and paper
- Tarps, ropes, and plastic bags
- Non-scented chlorine bleach

Food safety

Conditions created by a tornado, such as structural damage and debris, power outages, and localized flooding in facilities, can affect food safety. Keep the following in mind if your facility is serving as a community hub or if you are involved in cleanup efforts.

Time/Temperature Control for Safety Foods (TCS Foods)

Foods such as eggs, meats, seafood, milk, cheese, prepared foods, cooked vegetables, cut tomatoes, greens and melons, and bakery products with custard/cream fillings must be controlled for time and temperature. In a power outage, these foods may need to be destroyed if they go out of temperature range. Temperature-abused foods can grow harmful bacteria and spoil, putting people at risk for foodborne illness.

- Discard any frozen items that have thawed.
- After 8 hours with no power, discard all cold time/temperature controlled for safety foods that were above 45° F for 4 hours or longer and discard any cooked food that was in the cooling process. Discard hot foods after 4 hours out of temperature control.
- Use your senses. Any food that smells off, looks off-color, or has changed texture should be immediately discarded. Never taste suspect food items; if food has spoiled or been contaminated, you could make yourself sick. During intermittent power outages, create ice baths for potentially hazardous foods.

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Physical contamination or damage

Storm damage can also put food and facilities at risk for dangerous contamination, whether physical or biological in nature. These tips may help you make decisions about the safety of food items.

- Discard any canned foods with dented seams. Bacteria can grow when seams or seals are broken.
- Any uncovered or unprotected foods can be at risk of physical contamination with dirt, debris, broken glass, or other hazards. They should be discarded.
- Carefully inspect ALL foods, including those in containers, for damage or contamination. Look for signs such as punctures, physical contamination with glass or debris, or excess moisture. Discard anything that is damaged or questionable.

Flooding or sewage backups

A tornado can bring rain, but its sheer force can also rupture water lines and plumbing and create situations where facilities can become flooded. Flood water and sewage backups have the potential to substantially damage facilities, but are also significant food safety hazards. All flood and waste water have the potential to be contaminated with sewage and agricultural waste, along with chemicals or other contaminants. Therefore, if your facility has experienced flooding, even minor, take the following precautions.

- Before performing any flood clean up or entering an area where flood waters are still present, wear protective gear such as boots and coveralls. Avoid skin contact with the water.
- All of the following should be discarded if they have come into contact with flood waters:

– Foods	– Grains	– Foils and plastic wrap	– Wooden cutting boards
– Single service items	– Spices and seasonings	– Jars/bottles with screw caps, flip tops, snap tops, twist caps, etc.	
- Fabric furnishings and carpets must be discarded. Some equipment may need to be discarded if it cannot be disinfected or if it is not functional.
- Affected walls, floors, and surfaces must be washed, rinsed and disinfected. Use a disinfectant that is effective against norovirus or prepare a 1,000 to 5,000 ppm chlorine solution by adding 2 ounces to 1 cup of concentrated household bleach (8.25%) to 1 gallon of potable water.
- It is essential to remember to use unscented bleach, wear gloves and make fresh bleach solutions daily.
- Metal, glass or ceramic pans, dishes, or utensils that contact flood waters must be washed, rinsed and disinfected before use.
- Food contact surfaces must be rinsed with potable water following the use of this disinfecting solution.
- For undamaged canned food disinfection, cans should be washed in detergent, rinsed, and then immersed into a 500 ppm chlorine solution for 15 minutes before being rinsed and air dried. A 500 ppm chlorine can be made by adding 4 ounces bleach to 5 gallons of water.

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Water supply

A clean water supply and sufficient plumbing are necessary for food operation. If water service is interrupted or becomes contaminated, you may need to consider these additional food safety measures.

- Drink and serve only bottled water if the municipal supply or well-water may be contaminated or if there is a boil water advisory. Boil water for a minimum of one minute for all hand washing and ware washing. Follow hand washing with hand sanitizer. Use gloves for all ready-to-eat food contact.
- Prepare only menu items that require no water or minimal water to prepare.
- Use disposable plates, cups, and cutlery to limit the need for dish washing.
- Grocery stores should shut off produce sprayers in the event of a contaminated water supply.
- Stop using ice machines or soda fountains if the water supply is contaminated. Serve canned or bottled drinks.
- When service is restored, discard first cycles and sanitize ice bins before resuming ice service. Flush all water lines for 5 minutes or longer before using.
- Only use a dish machine or dishwasher if 180° F or hotter water is available. Use a three-compartment sink to wash wares with boiled water as a substitute for a dishwasher.
- Toilet facilities must be available to employees or anyone preparing and handling food.

Additional resources

If you are interested in learning more about food and operational safety following a tornado, we recommend the below resources.

- [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Tornado Recovery](#)
- [FoodSafety.gov Emergency Preparedness Website](#)
- [National Ag Safety Database - Salvaging Food After A Tornado](#)

Steritech Resources

Steritech can support your organization with crisis management planning or flooding preparation and recovery, as well as any questions you may have about food safety following severe weather event. 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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