



Food Establishment Power Outages

Phone: 509-249-6508

Email: YHD.Help.Desk@co.yakima.wa.us

The time to plan for an emergency is before one happens. These guidelines can help retail food businesses know what to do before, during, and after a power outage so they can protect their customers from foodborne disease and minimize product losses.

The biggest food safety concern is the condition of potentially hazardous food such as meats, eggs, dairy products, cooked vegetables, and cut melons. Potentially hazardous foods are usually moist, non-acidic, perishable foods and must be kept at temperatures below 41°F or above 135°F for safety.

Before a power outage

- Consider having an electrical generator available during a power outage. It will need to be big enough to operate the electrical equipment in your facility, and its installation and use must be coordinated with your power company for safety.
- Investigate potential sources for a refrigerated truck to be used during a power outage.
- Think about creating an “emergency menu” of foods that can be served with minimal preparation and without additional cooking.
- Have a phone that plugs directly into a phone jack and does not require any additional power.
- Keep a list of emergency phone numbers, including the number for your local health department.

When a Power Outage Occurs

- Keep track of the time the outage begins.
- Stop using gas or solid fuel cooking and heating equipment if the exhaust hood and make-up air systems stop working. Using this equipment without proper ventilation can lead to a dangerous buildup of toxic fumes that may cause injury or death.
- Throw away any foods that are in the process of being cooked but have not yet reached their final cooking temperature.

Note: 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.

Stop preparing food if:

- Food cannot be kept at safe temperatures.
- There is no hot water.
- There is not enough water pressure.
- You cannot wash, rinse, and sanitize utensils properly.
- There is not enough light for employees to work safely.

What to do with Potentially Hazardous Foods

Cold Potentially Hazardous Foods

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- If practical, group packages of cold food together. Keep raw meats away from other kinds of food.
- Cover any open display refrigerators and freezers, especially vertical displays.
- Surround food with ice.

Caution: If you use dry ice to cool food, it may cause an unsafe buildup of carbon dioxide in enclosed spaces.

Cold Food Temperature			
Hours Power is Out	45°F or below	46°F to 50°F	51°F or above
0-2	OK	OK	OK
2-4	OK	OK	X
More than 4	OK	X	X

OK = Food may be sold, as long as it was 41°F or less when the power went out. Immediately cool food to 41°F or less.

X = Food may be unsafe and may not be sold.

Hot Potentially Hazardous Foods

- Don't put hot food in refrigerators or freezers.
- Use canned chafing dish fuel under food on electric steam tables to help keep potentially hazardous food over 135°F.

Hot Food Temperature		
Hours Power is Out	130°F or above	129°F or below
0-2	OK	OK
2-4	OK	X
More than 4	X	X

OK = Food may be sold, as long as it was 41°F or less when the power went out. Immediately cool food to 41°F or less.

X = Food may be unsafe and may not be sold.

Disposal of Food

- When in doubt, throw it out!
- If food must be thrown away, document the type and amount of food and the reason for disposal, so that you can provide the information to regulators and your insurance company.
- Small amounts of food to be thrown away should be treated with a cleaning product (such as bleach) so that they will not be eaten, then placed in the outside garbage bin.
- To throw away large amounts of food, contact your garbage disposal company or your local landfill operator for disposal instructions.
- If you have questions about the safety of specific foods, contact the Yakima Health District.

After Power is Restored

- Check the internal temperature of all hot and cold potentially hazardous food.
- Decide to either keep or throw away potentially hazardous food, as shown in the tables above.
- If cold foods were grouped together to keep them cold, space them out again so they will cool more quickly.

Reopening

If you voluntarily closed your facility, the following conditions should be verified before you resume food preparation and/or sale of potentially hazardous food:

- All unsafe potentially hazardous food (according to the charts above) has been discarded. If there are any questions about the safety of specific foods, contact YHD.
- Hot and cold potable running water is available for handwashing and dishwashing.
- All equipment and facilities are operating properly, including: lighting, refrigeration, hot holding, ventilation, and toilet facilities.
- Refrigerators are 41°F or less.
- Electricity and gas services have been restored.
- All circuit breakers have been properly reset as needed.
- Note: If your facility was closed by the Yakima Health District, it must remain closed until YHD gives you official approval to reopen.

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