

Backdoor Survival

Survival and preparedness tools for creating a stylish, sustainable lifestyle using self-reliance, thoughtful prepping and optimism.



Food Safety When the Grid Goes Down

August 9, 2012

SurvivalWoman



Recently, 600 million people in India were without power for two days. According to news sources, the suspected cause was one of simple supply and demand: more people wanted power than the Indian infrastructure was able to deliver. It was not only lights out – but lights out for half of the population. Even I have a problem wrapping my brain around a black out of that magnitude.

It is important to note that in India, for many, electrical power is a luxury, where according to a recent census, one third of the households do not have enough to power even light a single light bulb. Still, when the grid went down so did transportation systems, manufacturing system communications systems and of course, household systems.

And what about those household systems? The first thing that may come to mind is air conditioning in a climate where there is 80% humidity in 90 degree Fahrenheit temperatures. Sweltering heat can be uncomfortable, yes, but what about refrigeration? How do you keep food safe when the temperature is 90 and the power grid is down for longer than a few hours?

Keeping Food Safe When the Electricity Goes Out

1. Place appliance thermometers in both the refrigerator and the freezer. After a power outage, check the temperature to determine whether your food is still safe to consume. Safe temperatures are 40°F or lower in the refrigerator, 0°F or lower in the freezer.

2. Try to keep your freezer as full as possible. Fill empty juice or milk jugs with water and keep them in the freezer (unless you need the space for food, of course). If the power grid goes down, you can use these frozen blocks of ice to maintain the cold temperature in your refrigeration and/or to keep the temperature in your freezer colder for a longer period. A full freezer will hold its temperature for about 48 hours but only 24 hours if half-full.



In addition, if there are warnings of a severe storm on the way, freeze additional water in one-quart plastic storage bags. They are small enough to fit in around the food in the refrigerator and freezer to help keep food cold and won't make a mess when the ice melts.

3. Have a minimum of a week's supply of ready-to-eat food that does not require cooking or refrigeration after being opened.

4. Do not open the refrigerator and freezer doors unnecessarily. Take out what you need quickly then

close the doors and keep them closed. A refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours if the door is kept closed.

5. Have coolers on hand that can be used to store the refrigerated foods that you think you will need for the short term. Use the frozen jugs of ice from your freezer to keep the food in your cooler cold. This will mitigate having to open and close the refrigerator door unnecessarily.

6. When the power comes back, check the the temperature inside of your refrigerator and freezer. Discard perishable food that has been above 40°F for two hours or more.

7. Check each item separately. Throw out any food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture, or feels warm to the touch. With frozen food, check for ice crystals. The food in your freezer that partially or completely thawed may be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is 40°F or below.

8. Frozen foods that have been partially defrosted during an outage should be cooked or reheated to a minimum temperature of 160 degrees.

9. When in doubt, dump it. And never, ever taste food to determine whether it is safe to eat.

Food Safety Reference Charts

The following charts (which can also be found at the [FoodSafety.gov](http://www.FoodSafety.gov) website, can be used as a guide when determining whether your food is safe to eat following an outage. Note, however that these are best case times and temperatures and no fudging allowed. Furthermore, you need to decide on your own comfort level but in my own household, if the temperature goes above 36-38 degrees F for any period of time – even 30 minutes – out it goes.

Food Safety – Refrigerated Foods

Food Categories	Specific Foods	Held above 40 °F for over 2 hours
MEAT, POULTRY, SEAFOOD	Raw or leftover cooked meat, poultry, fish, or seafood; soy meat substitutes	Discard
	Thawing meat or poultry	Discard
	Salads: Meat, tuna, shrimp, chicken, or egg salad	Discard
	Gravy, stuffing, broth	Discard
	Lunchmeats, hot dogs, bacon, sausage, dried beef	Discard
	Pizza – with any topping	Discard
	Canned hams labeled "Keep Refrigerated"	Discard
	Canned meats and fish, opened	Discard
	Casseroles, soups, stews	Discard
	Soft Cheeses: blue/bleu, Roquefort, Brie, Camembert, cottage, cream, Edam, Monterey Jack, ricotta, mozzarella, Muenster, Neufchatel, queso blanco, queso fresco	Discard
CHEESE	Hard Cheeses: Cheddar, Colby, Swiss, Parmesan, provolone, Romano	Safe
	Processed Cheeses	Safe
	Shredded Cheeses	Discard
	Low-fat Cheeses	Discard
	Grated Parmesan, Romano, or combination (in can or jar)	Safe
DAIRY	Milk, cream, sour cream, buttermilk, evaporated milk, yogurt, eggnog, soy milk	Discard
	Butter, margarine	Safe
	Baby formula, opened	Discard
EGGS	Fresh eggs, hard-cooked in shell, egg dishes, egg products	Discard
	Custards and puddings, quiche	Discard

FRUITS	Fresh fruits, cut	Discard
	Fruit juices, opened	Safe
	Canned fruits, opened	Safe
	Fresh fruits, coconut, raisins, dried fruits, candied fruits, dates	Safe
SAUCES, SPREADS, JAMS	Opened mayonnaise, tartar sauce, horseradish	Discard if above 50 °F for over 8 hours.
	Peanut butter	Safe
	Jelly, relish, taco sauce, mustard, catsup, olives, pickles	Safe
	Worcestershire, soy, barbecue, hoisin sauces	Safe
	Fish sauces, oyster sauce	Discard
	Opened vinegar-based dressings	Safe
	Opened creamy-based dressings	Discard
	Spaghetti sauce, opened jar	Discard
BREAD, CAKES, COOKIES, PASTA, GRAINS	Bread, rolls, cakes, muffins, quick breads, tortillas	Safe
	Refrigerator biscuits, rolls, cookie dough	Discard
	Cooked pasta, rice, potatoes	Discard
	Pasta salads with mayonnaise or vinaigrette	Discard
	Fresh pasta	Discard
PIES, PASTRY	Cheesecake	Discard
	Breakfast foods –waffles, pancakes, bagels	Safe
	Pastries, cream filled	Discard
	Pies – custard, cheese filled, or chiffon; quiche	Discard
	Pies, fruit	Safe
VEGETABLES	Fresh mushrooms, herbs, spices	Safe
	Greens, pre-cut, pre-washed, packaged	Discard
	Vegetables, raw	Safe
	Vegetables, cooked; tofu	Discard
	Vegetable juice, opened	Discard
	Baked potatoes	Discard
	Commercial garlic in oil	Discard
	Potato salad	Discard
	Casseroles, soups, stews	Discard

Food Safety – Frozen Foods

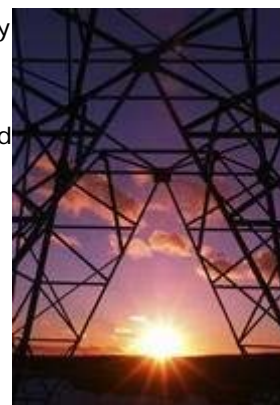
Food Categories	Specific Foods	Still contains ice crystals and feels as cold as if refrigerated	Thawed and held above 40 °F for over 2 hours
MEAT, POULTRY, SEAFOOD	Beef, veal, lamb, pork, and ground meats	Refreeze	Discard
	Poultry and ground poultry	Refreeze	Discard
	Variety meats (liver, kidney, heart, chitterlings)	Refreeze	Discard
	Casseroles, stews, soups	Refreeze.	Discard
	Fish, shellfish, breaded seafood products	However, there will be some texture and flavor loss.	Discard
DAIRY	Milk	Refreeze. May lose some texture.	Discard
	Eggs (out of shell) and egg products	Refreeze	Discard
	Ice cream, frozen yogurt	Discard	Discard
	Cheese (soft and semi-soft)	Refreeze. May lose some texture.	Discard

	Hard cheeses	Refreeze	Refreeze
	Shredded cheeses	Refreeze	Discard
	Casseroles containing milk, cream, eggs, soft cheeses	Refreeze	Discard
	Cheesecake	Refreeze	Discard
	Juices	Refreeze	Refreeze. Discard if mold, yeasty smell or sliminess develops.
FRUITS	Home or commercially packaged	Refreeze. Will change texture and flavor.	Refreeze. Discard if mold, yeasty smell or sliminess develops.
	Juices	Refreeze	Discard after held above 40 °F for 6 hours.
VEGETABLES	Home or commercially packaged or blanched	Refreeze. May suffer texture and flavor loss.	Discard after held above 40 °F for 6 hours.
	Breads, rolls, muffins, cakes (without custard fillings)	Refreeze	Refreeze
	Cakes, pies, pastries with custard or cheese filling	Refreeze	Discard
BREADS, PASTRIES	Pie crusts, commercial and homemade bread dough	Refreeze. Some quality loss may occur.	Refreeze. Quality loss is considerable
	Casseroles – pasta, rice based	Refreeze	Discard
	Flour, cornmeal, nuts	Refreeze	Refreeze
	Breakfast items –waffles, pancakes, bagels	Refreeze	Refreeze
OTHER	Frozen meal, entree, specialty items (pizza, sausage and biscuit, meat pie, convenience foods)	Refreeze	Discard

The Final Word

Unlike in India, most western countries have sufficient electricity to supply every household with the power they need to hook up to the grid. On the other hand, only those who purposely live off grid and rely on solar or generator power know how precious this resource is – especially when it comes to food safety and keeping things cold.

The best time to prepare for an off grid emergency is now, while the power is still on. The low cost investment in freezer and refrigerator thermometers plus taking the time to store some frozen jugs of water may make the difference between having a full freezer and refrigerator of food or a dumpster full of smelly, spoiled and unsafe food.



Enjoy your next adventure through common sense and thoughtful preparation!

Gaye

Check this out . . .

- [15 Ways to Conserve Household Water Now](#)
- [Everyday Household Tools for Everyday Fix-it Needs](#)
- [When Things Go Boom it is Too Late to Prepare](#)

Bargain Bin: Powers out and the grid is down. Are you ready?

Taylor Digital Stick On Refrigerator/Freezer Thermometer: What I like about this thermometer is that it sticks to the wall of your refrigerator and does not get knocked down and hidden from sight. About \$11

Taylor Freezer-Refrigerator Thermometer: This thermometer is less than \$6 with free shipping. At this price, there really is no reason not to monitor the temperature inside your refrigeration appliances. You will be surprised at how quickly the temperature rises when the door is left open for just a few minutes.

Flexible Cutting Boards: Speaking of food safety, I ditched my wood cutting boards years ago. These days I use these flexible boards that are dishwasher safe. I have 10 of them! There are so many uses for these boards not the least of which is that they keep counters nice and clean when working with sticky or messy food items. I simply put one or more of these down first. Who said cutting boards were just for slicing and dicing?

100 Hour Plus Emergency Candle Clear Mist: My number one choice for emergency candles. This liquid paraffin candle will burn for over 100 hours. These are also odorless and smokeless, making them a great emergency light source that can be extinguished and re-lit as often as needed. Very safe to use.

Coleman Candle Lantern: When the lights go out, there is nothing like a Coleman. They last forever because spare parts are always available. A candle lantern will not give out the bright light of say, a propane or kerosene lantern. On the other hand, candles are like to be available when other fuels are not. About \$16.



Yumm . . . strawberries. This month [Emergency Essentials](#) is featuring 28% off on their [Freeze-Dried Strawberries](#). These are the real thing, naturally sweet with no sweeteners or additives. A #10 can is now \$14.99 instead of the normal \$20.95.

Other items on sale this month include [Apple Pieces](#), the [12-Can Baking Combo](#), [Butter Powder](#), [Peanut Butter Powder](#) and more.

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permalink [<http://www.backdoorsurvival.com/index.php/2012/08/09/food-safety-when-the-grid-goes-down/>]

Comments

Food Safety When the Grid Goes Down — 5 Comments



[millenniumfly](#)
on August 9, 2012 at 4:14 am said:

You might also purchase a wireless thermometer setup so you can easily monitor freezer and fridge

temps without opening the doors. You can even get models that include several trasmitters for use wherever you like.



SurvivalWoman

on August 9, 2012 at 6:44 am said:

If you would like to print the charts, I suggest you go to the charts on the <http://www.foodsafety.gov> site. Here are the links:

http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/refridg_food.html

http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/frozen_food.html

There is a print button on the pages mentioned that will allow you to print the chart for reference purposes.

Gaye



GoneWithTheWind

on August 9, 2012 at 8:35 am said:

A great suggestion came out of the Katrina disaster. Place icecubes in a zip-lock baggy and place in your freezer. Then later if power was cut off long enough to thaw your frozen food but later came back on restoring everything to a frozen state the ice cubes would now be a block of ice in the baggy and you would know the food is likely unsafe.



Gary Wolf

on August 10, 2012 at 9:03 pm said:

<http://www.stoopidis.com/2012/08/storage-times-for-refrigerator-and.html>

This is what "SurvivalWoman" posted links to I just put them on one page and suggest printing.

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