

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 power even to 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 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 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 |
| | Cheesecake | Discard |
| | Breakfast foods –waffles, pancakes, bagels | Safe |
| | Pastries, cream filled | Discard |
| PIES, PASTRY | Pies – custard, cheese filled, or chiffon; quiche | Discard |
| | Pies, fruit | Safe |
| | 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 |
| VEGETABLES | Commercial garlic in oil | Discard |
| | Potato salad | Discard |
| | Casseroles, soups, stews | Discard |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Food Safety – Frozen Foods

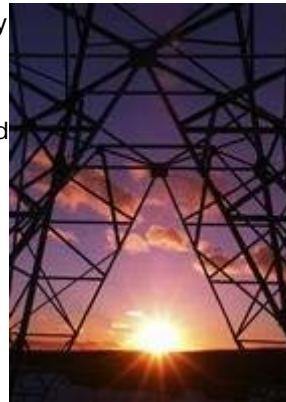
| Food Categories | Specific Foods | Still contains ice crystals and feels as cold as if refrigerated | Thawed and held above 40 °F for over 2 hours |
|------------------------|--|---|--|
| MEAT, POULTRY, SEAFOOD | Beef, veal, lamb, pork, and ground meats | Refreeze | Discard |
| | Poultry and ground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

Gayle

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.

Shop Amazon Tactical – Great Selection of Optics, Knives, Cases, Equipment

***Want to help support Backdoor Survival?**
Your purchases earn a small commission and for that I thank you!*

Like this and want more?

CLICK HERE to receive Backdoor Survival Posts by **Email** (usually on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday)
CLICK HERE to sign up for the new Backdoor Survival **Newsletter!** (Periodically)

Spread the Word – Tell your friends: Share Backdoor Survival with your friends. All you need to do is send them a short email. Now that was easy!



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 transmitters 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.

Pingback: [Dr. Richard Alan Miller » Blog Archive » Food Safety When the Grid Goes Down | Self-Sufficienc](http://www.backdoorsurvival.com/index.php/2012/08/09/food-safety-...)