

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

## Winter 2012 (Dec./Jan./Feb.)

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### Food Safety During Power Outages

Hurricane Irene in late August, and an early October snow storm in 2011, truly reminded us how unpredictable Mother Nature can be. Many homes, restaurants, and retail establishments lost power in the wake of these storms. As we all scramble to recover as business owners and managers, we must not lose sight of the importance of food safety. Proper decision making prior, during, and immediately after a power outage is necessary to protect consumers from unsafe food and minimize product loss. The Health Department recommends that food establishments develop a power outage plan before the need arises. The following are recommendations that apply to food safety during an extended power outage (more than two hours).

#### When there is a Power Outage, we recommend:



- Take note of the time the power went out.
- Stop all cooking operations.
- Discard food products that are in the process of being cooked, and foods that have not yet reached the final cooking temperature.
- Do not place hot food in refrigerators or freezers, as this will rapidly raise the temperature inside the refrigerator or freezer and may make more food unusable.
- Keep hot, potentially hazardous food at 140°F or above. Food that has reached final cooking temperature may be kept hot (140°F) by use of canned heat in chafing dishes.
- Use ice or/ice baths/ice wands to rapidly cool small batches of hot food.

#### Food Safety: Potentially Hazardous Foods

Potentially hazardous foods are those foods that are high protein foods such as meat, eggs, dairy, and cooked vegetables that support the rapid and progressive growth of disease causing bacteria. Food borne illnesses can be caused by bacteria that can multiply rapidly in foods when the food is held in the temperature danger zone (41° to 140°F).

#### Keep foods at safe temperatures

Refrigerated, potentially hazardous foods must be stored at or below 41°F. Frozen foods must be maintained frozen. Hot, cooked potentially hazardous food must be maintained at 140°F or above.



#### Freezers



Leave the freezer door closed. A full freezer should keep food safe about two days -- a half-full freezer, about one day. Add bags of ice or dry ice to the freezer if it appears that the power will be off for an extended time. You can safely re-freeze thawed foods that still contain ice crystals and are 41°F or less.

## Refrigerators

Food in refrigerators should be safe as long as the power is out no more than about four to six hours. Leave the door closed; every time you open it, needed cold air escapes, causing the foods inside to reach unsafe temperatures. Discard any potentially hazardous foods that has been above 41°F for four hours or more, reached a temperature of 45°F or higher for any length of time, or has an unusual color, odor, or texture. ***When in doubt, just throw it out!***



If it appears the power will be off for more than six hours, ice, dry ice, or frozen gel packs can be used to keep potentially hazardous foods at 41° or below. Moving refrigerated food to a walk-in freezer or obtaining a refrigerated truck are other options to keep food safe. Food should not be transferred to private homes.

## What to Discard

The following are examples of foods that can be discarded or saved once power is restored.

### Discard

The following foods in refrigerators and freezers should be discarded if kept over four hours at above 41°F, or if the temperature exceeds 45°F for any length of time.

- Meat, poultry, fish, eggs and egg substitutes - raw or cooked
- Milk, cream, and soft cheese
- Custard, chiffon, pumpkin, or cheese pies
- Cream-filled pastries
- Cookie dough made with eggs
- Whipped Butter
- Cut Melons
- Cooked vegetables
- Casseroles, stews or soups
- Lunch meats and hot dogs
- Creamy-based foods made on-site

### Save

The following foods may be kept at room temperature a few days although food quality may be affected.

- Butter or margarine
- Hard and processed cheeses
- Fresh uncut fruits and vegetables
- Dried fruits and coconut
- Opened jars of vinegar-based salad dressings, jelly, relish, taco sauce, barbecue sauce, mustard, ketchup, olives and peanut butter
- Fruit juices
- Fresh herbs and spices
- Fruit pies, breads, rolls, and muffins
- Cakes, except cream cheese frosted or cream-filled
- Flour and nuts

## When Power is Restored

Identify and discard potentially hazardous foods that may have been above 41°F or below 140°F for four or more hours or above 45°F for any length of time.

- Check the internal food temperatures using a food thermometer and record the temperature.
- If practical, separate packages of food in refrigeration units and freezers to allow for faster re-cooling.

## Things To Look Out For When Serving People Your Dignity (Your Food You Cooked)

When one is bored, lonely, and wants to feel better about oneself, what better activity to do than to eat out at an awesome restaurant to indulge in your favorite foods? Okay, maybe there are a few better activities, but for me at least, it's right up on the top ten. So when you're out eating, do you really know what you are eating? Like, really?

I'm pretty sure that a large portion of you would love a big, nice, juicy burger (I like mine medium-rare) with some pepper jack cheese, fried onions, jalapenos and E.coli. What? Wait... what? E. coli? "Nooo I didn't order that," you say to yourself the next morning as you are keeled over the toilet bowl, passionately spewing portions of last night's pleasures. At least during this time, you can use your significant other to your advantage and have them baby you.

Sometimes, it just happens, and it can't be helped; but if you are doing an event for a large number of people, isn't it better to do all you can and be all you can be in preventing sprinkling that savvy spice of salmonella on your grilled chicken breasts? It doesn't taste better than barbeque sauce, but it certainly makes itself known better.

### Prevention!

There are some things you can do in order to prevent this unfortunate sort of thing from happening to your lovely guests.

First, it's probably a good idea to wash your hands. No one is twisting your arm or anything, but I mean, it's probably a good thing to do... and don't just splash your hands with a dash of cold water either, and pull one of those subtle "I'm gonna dry my hands on my clothes" moves. Use hot water, SOAP (yes, I said soap, believe it or not) and paper towels. It's best to use paper towels that you can throw away rather than using the same soiled towel over and over again.

Next, check temperatures! If you want to cook your own chicken breast to only 82 degrees before serving it to yourself, that's cool, but don't come crying to us when you feel like you're dying for the next 3 days. Poultry should be cooked to an internal temperature of 165 degrees. Ground beef or pork should preferably be cooked to 155 degrees, while regular, whole steaks or pork loins should be cooked to 145 degrees. Fish should also be cooked to 145 degrees. I don't care if it only reaches these temperatures for one second, just do it. If you like your meat bloody (like me), trust me it still will be. It doesn't take much for it to reach proper temperature.

Watch your temperatures while your holding food too! If you are cold-holding anything, aka keeping it cold, aka keeping it in a fridge or cooler, aka don't want it to get warm, it should be kept at 41 degrees or COLDER. Not warmer, but colder. Yes, 76 degrees is WARMER than 41. There have been some certain past experiences for us working at the Heath Department where there was obviously some sort of confusion as to which number was higher. Don't make this mistake, please. IF you are hot-holding foods, aka keeping them hot aka want to keep them hot, such as soups, stews, cooked meats, etc. then these should be held at 135 degrees or above. HINT: It might be a good idea to pick up a digital thermometer to check food temps at your convenience.

IF you really have no place to hot hold something, like a pig roast, and had to leave it on the table while serving it (as it's temperature slowly declines), we REALLLY don't like you guys doing this, but if it must be done and there is absolutely no other choice, just make sure it's used up and or thrown after 4 hours. But remember, that's a last resort.

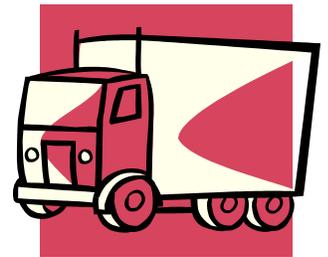
Okay, if you're directly handling ready-to-eat foods (like vegetables, hamburger patties, Cheez-Itz, or unwrapped Milky Way bars) wear gloves. Nobody wants your grimy hands all over their slab of filet mignon (especially if it's got blue cheese crusting on it... Yummmm). So wear gloves, and change them frequently. Don't just wear the same pair of gloves for 5 hours without ever changing them and washing your hands in between because, in that case, you might as well just not even wear gloves. The key is to not cross-contaminate the food. In addition to this, all food should be COVERED AT ALL TIMES. You can use whatever you want: plastic wrap, foil, those cool metal covers, your finely-knit sweater your grandmother gave you for Christmas last year... as long as it's something CLEAN and expendable (just kidding about the sweater).

So, those are the most important points. Follow them, and you should be okay. Don't follow them, and well, I don't know. At least, let me know so I don't eat it. For any questions, call health inspector Chris Cantisano at the Englewood Health Department at 201-871-6514. Thanks, and have a lovely day.

Chris Cantisano, REHS

### **Truck Shipment: Potential for Food-Borne Disease**

As restaurant owners/operators and managers, many of you take all the necessary precautions when preparing, handling and storing foods, to prevent time and temperature abuse of potentially hazardous foods. One important step in the food handling procedures that is sometimes overlooked is the monitoring of the integrity of your food/inventory shipments. Receiving is an important operational step to food safety. At receiving, your main concern is contamination from pathogens and the formation of harmful toxins. Many times products are received that are expired, that are out of temperature, and are delivered in trucks that are not sanitary. Moreover, sometimes inventory is received and not put away in a timely matter. So here are some recommended steps to assure food quality when receiving food shipments.

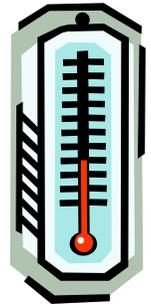


#### **Instructions to follow when receiving food shipments to protect food quality and ensure food safety:**

- Obtain food, ingredients, and packaging materials from approved sources (suppliers who are regulated and inspected by appropriate regulatory authorities).
- Schedule deliveries to arrive at designated times during operational hours.
- Post the delivery schedule, including the names of vendors, days, and times of deliveries and drivers' names.
- Establish a rejection policy to ensure accurate, timely, consistent, and effective refusal and return of rejected foods.
- Organize freezer and refrigeration space, loading docks, and stores before deliveries.



- Gather product specification lists and purchase orders, temperature logs, calibrated thermometers, pens, flashlights, and clean loading carts before deliveries.
- Determine whether foods will be marked with the date of arrival or the "use by" date and mark accordingly upon receipt.
- Transfer foods to their appropriate locations as quickly as possible.



**Monitoring:**

- Inspect the delivery truck when it arrives to ensure that it is clean, free of putrid odors, and organized to prevent cross-contamination. Be sure refrigerated foods are delivered on a refrigerated truck.
- Check the interior temperature of refrigerated trucks.
- Check frozen foods to ensure that they are all frozen solid and show no signs of thawing and refreezing, such as the presence of large ice crystals or liquids on the bottom of cartons.
- Check the refrigerated foods:

**A.** For fresh meat, fish, and poultry products, insert a clean and sanitized thermometer into the center of the product to ensure a temperature of 41 °F or below.

**B.** For packaged products, insert a food thermometer between two packages being careful not to puncture the wrapper. If the temperature exceeds 41 °F, it may be necessary to take the internal temperature before accepting the product.

**C.** For eggs, the interior temperature of the truck should be 45 °F or below.

Check dates of milk, eggs, and other perishable goods to ensure safety and quality.

Check the integrity of food packaging.

**Check the cleanliness of crates and other shipping containers before accepting products.**

**Reject foods that are shipped in dirty crates.**



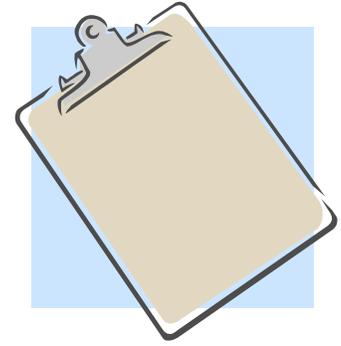
**Reject the following:**

- Frozen foods with signs of previous thawing.
- Cans that have signs of deterioration, such as swollen sides or ends, flawed seals or seams, dents, or rust.
- Punctured packages.
- Foods with out-dated expiration dates.

- Foods that are out of safe temperature zone or deemed unacceptable by the established rejection policy.

**Verification and Record Keeping:**

The foodservice manager will verify that food service employees are receiving products using the proper procedure by visually monitoring receiving practices during the shift and documenting all the temperatures taken.



**Remember food safety is a collaborative effort.**

Fausto Garcia, Jr., REHS

**Sources:** New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Service – Chapter 24 of the New Jersey State Sanitary Code

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