



Retail Food Establishment Power Outage Emergency Response Fact Sheet and Guidance

A power outage can potentially affect a food establishment in the following ways:

1. Refrigerators will not be functional,
2. Cooking, hot holding, mechanical dishwashing, and equipment that requires power for operation will not be functional,
3. Hot water may not be available,
4. The facility may not have water service if it is supplied by a well with an electric pump.

In most cases of power failure, the food establishment may need to be closed. Operators should close their food establishment immediately if a significant threat or danger to the public's health exists or if food safety can no longer be assured. Still, some facilities may have backup power generation or gas-powered appliances, such as stoves or hot water heaters, and be able to continue normal operations.

Facilities trying to remain open may need access to large amounts of ice for cooling foods to maintain the required product temperatures. Some facilities may have to be limited to the sale of non-time/ temperature control for safety (TCS) foods. Others may be able to operate, if the facility is able to implement alternative procedures to continue to meet the requirements of the [2023 ODA Retail Food Code](#).

Guidelines for Salvaging Foods

Refrigerated Foods

Time/ temperature control for safety (TCS) foods must be evaluated to determine whether proper storage temperatures can be maintained throughout the outage.

If it is known how long the power has been out:

- If the power has been out for less than 4 hours and the power is expected back shortly, then the refrigerator(s) should be kept closed. Insulated covers, plastic, or cardboard may be used to retain cold air in open air cases.
- If the power has been out for less than 4 hours and not expected to return shortly, then TCS foods should be kept on ice to keep them cold.
- When the power is restored, the temperature of TCS foods should be taken to ensure that they are at 41°F or below.
- TCS foods above 41°F, that have been out of temperature for more than four hours, should be discarded.

If it is not known how long the power has been out:

- Temperatures of TCS foods should be taken immediately and foods with temperatures of 41°F or less should be iced to maintain their required temperatures.
- TCS foods at temperatures greater than 41°F for over four hours should be discarded.

Frozen Foods

Foods stored in freezers will generally stay frozen or below 41°F for a day or two during a power outage. The actual time the food will remain frozen or cold, however, depends on the size and type of the freezer, the types and amounts of food stored in the unit, the temperature of the frozen food, and whether the unit is well insulated.

Fully-or well insulated freezers will keep foods frozen longer than those that are partially full or poorly insulated ones. Also, larger freezers may keep foods frozen longer than smaller units. Meat and poultry should stay frozen longer than baked goods.

Consider moving all frozen foods to a functional freezer if one is available. Make sure the food is insulated and protected from contamination during transportation. If the food cannot be moved, leave it in the freezer and periodically check that the temperature is still meeting the minimum food code requirements. Consider grouping similar types of foods together to try to keep them colder longer. Meat and poultry should be stored below and away from other foods in case they begin to thaw; to prevent cross-contamination from potential dripping juices. If it is available, dry ice can be used in the unit to keep foods cold.

Frozen foods that have been thawed:

- If the power has been out long enough for foods to thaw, then product temperatures should be taken to ensure that they still meet the minimum food code temperature requirements.
- TCS foods at 41°F or less should be iced and maintained at that temperature until power is restored. TCS foods that have thawed or are partially thawed need to be checked to see if they are still safe for refrigerated storage. Defrosted foods should not be refrozen.
- TCS foods that have been at temperatures greater than 41°F for over 4 hours should be discarded.

Hot Foods

TCS foods, which are being cooked but have not reached their final cooking temperature, should be discarded. Foods that are in a hot holding device when the power goes out should be immediately cooled in an ice bath to 41°F or below, kept iced until the power is restored then placed under refrigeration. TCS foods shall be cooled within 2 hours from (135°F) to (70°F); and within a total of 6 hours from 57°C (135°F) to 5°C (41°F) or less. If there is not enough ice to cool hot foods to 41°F or the food is unable to cool quickly enough to meet food code time/temperature requirements, then they should be discarded after being out of temperature for longer than 4 hours.

Keeping temperature log sheets for hot and cold foods will help determine when they need to be discarded.

Prior to discarding all foods, a store should consider what evidence must be retained for insurance loss claims.

If you have any questions regarding how to keep TCS foods safely at the required temperature during a power outage, please contact your local food safety inspector. Contact information for your local food safety inspector is available online: [Food Safety Inspector Search Directory](#)