



Public Emergency Preparedness Emergency Response Fact Sheet

RADIOLOGICALLY CONTAMINATED FOOD AND WATER SUPPLY

What is being done to ensure the safety of food and water during this emergency?

- State and federal radiation experts are responding at the scene to determine what areas pose a hazard for radiation, including the impact on food and water.
- It is important for consumers to pay attention for specific announcements and information regarding their food and water supply. Officials will communicate through the media, on Web sites, and by responding to phone calls regarding food safety issues.

Is food and water safe to eat and drink?

- Food and water can be contaminated by the spread of airborne dust. Unprotected food and water may be at risk, provided it is in the radioactively contaminated area. Food and water inside the contaminated area will be closely monitored to determine the level of contamination.
- Food stored in cabinets or a refrigerator is likely safe. Radioactive dust can settle anywhere normal dust can, so it is not likely to get inside a sealed area or container. Generally food and water that is and remains beyond the radioactively contaminated area is safe for consumption, but OPHD is conducting tests to confirm this.

What is the possibility that food has been unknowingly transported through this contaminated area via trucks, barges, etc.?

- There is always the possibility that food has been unknowingly exposed. Food that is in containers, packages, or otherwise covered during transport is less likely to be a problem.
- Assuming authorities have been notified of potential exposure of radiation of food, including livestock, being transported through the area, that food will be identified and kept from further movement. It will be isolated and quarantined until an assessment has been completed on its exposure to radiation.
- After a radiological explosion event, roadblocks will be set up around areas exposed to radiation, eliminating additional food exposure during transport.
- Food safety officials will be coordinating efforts to deal with retail establishments. That includes documentation of how much food may be contaminated and ensuring that it is not distributed any further. The amount of food quarantined will depend on the scope of the incident.

Would this food be dangerous for consumption?

Food that is known to have been in or transported through the radioactive zone will be assessed for exposure to radiation.

What will you tell people within the blast/plume areas to do with their food?

- Food and water supplies most likely are safe. However, any unpackaged food or water that has been out in the open and close to the incident may have radioactive dust on it.

- People who live within the blast/plume area should not consume water or food that was out in the open.
- Food inside of cans and other sealed containers is safe to eat. As an extra precaution, wash the outside of the container before opening it.

What about backyard gardens? How far away do you have to be to have safe homegrown food?

- Authorities are monitoring food and water quality for safety and will keep the public informed regarding the area in which food grown outside may not be safe.
- Food from the garden can become externally contaminated and should be rinsed off before it is brought into the home and eaten. Washing is the most effective measure.
- Specifically, garden lettuce and other leafy crops should not be consumed, and will need additional evaluation before recommendations for use are provided by officials. Green vegetables that are contaminated should have outer layers removed.
- Roots and tubers absorb little contamination. The normal cleaning or peeling of underground vegetables such as potatoes and carrots would be adequate for removing contamination.
- Fruits ripe at the time of a radiological event may be lost due to a possible personal hazard to the picker. Fruits that don't have to be picked right away can remain and be safely picked after the contamination has decayed.
- Taking the necessary precautions will allow food from your garden to be safely consumed. However, if there is any doubt about the food's safety, throw it out. Residents with home gardens should also pay attention for specific instructions as more information becomes available.

Are there any visible tests, or *any* tests for that matter to test backyard produce?

- There are no visible tests that consumers can conduct. Radiological responders will determine safe/unsafe levels for Portland areas, but can't provide individualized service.
- State and federal radiation experts will be the best ones to determine radioactivity levels in backyard produce. The collective radiological responders from Oregon, Washington, U.S. EPA, U.S. Department of Energy, Centers for Disease Control, Food and Drug Administration, will be collecting and analyzing thousands of samples. These samples will be sent to government and private laboratories and will result in a more specific area for the hazard zone.
- Citizens should take care to clean and peel any vegetables grown outdoors.

What will happen to grain in silos in the blast area?

- That will be up to the U.S. Department of Agriculture to determine. Generally, grain protected in a silo will be safe from exposure to radiation. Grain will not be allowed to be moved until officials have determined its safety and the safety of the surrounding area.

What will you do with contaminated food? How much food will you need to quarantine?

Where is it disposed of?

- Consumers with potentially contaminated food should wait for specific instructions on disposal, which will be determined based on the contamination levels for their area.
- People should segregate that food but not throw it away until officials provide disposal instructions. If contamination levels in the area are low enough, general disposal measures should be taken.