

# What to do..... if there's a power outage in your food facility

Power outages sometimes occur in Alberta and a lack of electricity can pose risks to foods when coolers, freezers and hot holding equipment are not working. Power surges can also cause damage to equipment and to the electrical system in the building. If a food facility relies on well water, power outages and surges can also result in a lack of water.

Plans and procedures should be in place to handle an electrical outage before one occurs. Below are some steps to be taken during and after a power outage in a commercial food facility.

## *Preparing for Scheduled Power Outages:*

If you are advised about an upcoming power outage, plan to close your food facility until after power is restored and you are confident that food safety has not been compromised.

You should also plan to:

- reduce the amount of high risk foods on site. For example, food deliveries can be cancelled until after the outage or move high risk foods to another location.
- keep freezer doors and lids closed for the duration of the power outage.
- monitor and record temperatures of high risk foods left on site during the power outage.
- follow the temperature guidance information provided in this document for any high risk foods left on site during the outage.

## *During A Power Outage:*

- Close the facility. Most equipment will not be working and staff will not be able to see well enough to safely prepare and serve foods.
- Write down the time when the power outage started. This will start the countdown of when foods in hot and cold holding units will need to be discarded. If no one is present when the outage starts, the local power company may be able to provide this information.
- Keep cooler and freezer doors closed as much as possible. If a cooler or freezer is an open display unit, transfer cold foods to a unit with sealed doors or cover the unit with cardboard, plastic or other insulated material. Only use cardboard if foods are pre-packaged or well covered to protect the foods from contamination from the cardboard.
- DO NOT put hot foods into a cooler when the power is off as this will raise the temperature of the cooler much faster.
- Turn off light switches, equipment and computers in the facility to protect them from surge damage when the power is restored.
- Consider transporting food to an approved alternate location with adequate refrigeration or freezer space if you know that you will be without power for more than four hours.
  - Ensure that foods are transported in coolers with ice packs to keep them at 4°C or less.

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- Contact your district public health inspector if the power outage is going to last more than four hours. They need to be aware of the outage and can provide guidance, if needed.
- Cancel deliveries of high risk foods to reduce food waste if the outage is likely going to last more than one day.

### *After the Power Returns:*

Plan to stay closed until all actions have been taken to ensure food safety.

- Dispose of foods as directed by the information provided below or as directed by the district public health inspector.
  - Consult with your insurance company to determine the necessary documentation for your insurance claim.
- Thoroughly clean and sanitize any coolers, freezers and hot holding units that had held foods that were discarded before restocking these units with new foods.
- Check that all electrical breakers, utilities and equipment are in good working condition. Surge damage may have occurred or electronic settings may have been reset when the equipment was off.
  - Check any well pumps, water treatment systems or other equipment that supply water to the building to ensure they are working properly.
  - Check any sump or septic pumps to ensure they are working properly.
- Ensure that coolers and freezers are operating normally and have reached a safe temperature of 4°C or less before putting foods back into them.
- Make sure that hot water is available, especially if a hot water on-demand or other electrical hot water system is used.
- Clean and sanitize all food equipment and food preparation surfaces if the power outage lasts more than four hours as bacterial growth can occur on surfaces.
- Remember that appearance and odour are not good indicators of food safety, foods that look and smell fine may not be safe to consume.
- Contact your district public health inspector or local Environmental Public Health Office prior to opening.

### *When to Dispose Foods:*

**High Risk Foods** means foods that are not shelf stable and require refrigeration to prevent the growth of bacteria. This can include, but is not limited to, meats, dairy products, cooked grains, cooked vegetables, and cut produce.

**Ready-To-Eat Foods** means foods that are intended for immediate consumption in the same state in which it is sold or distributed (i.e. without additional processing or heating) and does not include nuts, fruits or vegetables that must be peeled, husked, shelled or washed by the consumer.

Below is general guidance about discarding high risk foods after a power outage. If you are unsure, consult with the district public health inspector.

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### High Risk Cold Foods:

- Discard ready-to-eat foods that were above 6°C for more than 4 hours.
- Discard foods above 6°C if you don't know how long the power was out.
  - Cool to 4°C and serve or cook all foods in a cooler that were at 6°C or less.
- Cook to 74°C and serve foods stored between 4°C and room temperature for less than 4 hours.

### High Risk Hot Foods:

- Discard hot foods that were below 60°C for more than 2 hours.
- Reheat to 74°C hot foods that were below 60°C for less than 2 hours.
  - If foods are reheated for service after a power outage, they cannot be cooled and then re-heated and served at a later time.
- Discard partially cooked foods if the power outage lasted longer than 1 hour.
- Cook to 74°C and serve any partially cooked foods if the power outage lasted less than 1 hour.
- Serve foods that were stored at 60°C or higher throughout the power outage.

### Frozen Foods:

- Discard any foods that show signs of thawing.
- Follow high risk cold foods guidance above for foods above 6°C.

Without power and if the doors are kept closed, upright and chest freezers that are completely full can keep foods frozen for up to two days. Half-full freezers can keep foods frozen for one day.

***When in doubt, throw it out.***

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Contact us at 1-833-476-4743 or [submit a request online](#) at [ahs.ca/eph](https://ahs.ca/eph).

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