



Guidelines for Food Safety at Retail Establishments During Temporary Power Outages



The California Department of Public Health, Food and Drug Branch developed this guidance document for the retail food industry on what to do before, during and immediately after a power outage. The focus is on the action steps to take for potentially hazardous foods (PHF), which are those foods that can support the rapid growth of microorganisms at temperatures between 41°F and 135°F. Your local environmental health agency is primarily responsible for enforcing the current California Retail Food Code (CRFC) and may have additional information for your specific situation.

Before a Power Outage

Develop a plan of action on how to keep refrigerated foods cool in your facility. This may include consolidating foods into insulated containers or walk-in coolers, covering open display cases, and purchasing ice or dry ice from local retailers. You should also keep a supply of ice or gel packs frozen and readily accessible. Calibrated food thermometers, a battery operated clock and a temperature log will help you monitor and document the temperature of the food and the time it spent in the temperature danger zone of 41°F-135°F.

During a Power Outage

Your focus during a power outage is to keep foods out of the temperature danger zone as much as possible. Below are some action steps to take for both cold and hot foods.

Cold Foods

- Document temperature of the food and the time the power outage began.
- Keep all refrigerator/freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- Cover open, refrigerated display cases or consolidate products to lessen heat gain.



- Use ice, gel packs, or dry ice* as necessary to keep foods cold.
- Be sure the water from melting ice doesn't contaminate foods

(*Thawing dry ice releases carbon dioxide. Exercise caution when using in large quantities or in enclosed rooms.)

Hot Foods

- Document temperature of the food and the time the power outage began.
- Discard any foods in the process of being cooked that had not reached their appropriate final cooking temperature when the outage occurred.
- Cover hot food display cases with thermal blankets or lids to reduce temperature loss.

Do not prepare food if you cannot properly wash your hands, clean and sanitize food contact surfaces, or maintain other required food safety practices.

After a Power Outage

The steps you take after a power outage will vary, depending on the length of time your facility was without power and how effectively you were able to keep your food out of the temperature danger zone. Table 1 will help you decide how to handle refrigerated potentially hazardous foods. Table 2 is for potentially hazardous foods held in hot cases.

Table 1 - Refrigerated Potentially Hazardous Foods (PHF)

Duration of Outage (hours)	Temperature of Food When Power Returns		
	41°F or below	42°F to 49°F	50°F or above
0-2	PHF can be sold	Cool PHF to 41°F or below within 2 hours	Discard
2-3		Cool PHF to 41°F or below within 1 hour	
4+		Discard	

Table 2 - Hot Held Potentially Hazardous Foods (PHF)

Duration of Outage (hours)	Temperature of Food When Power Returns	
	135°F or above	134°F or below
0-2	PHF can be sold	1. May be sold if reheated to 165°F and then held at 135°F or above; or 2. May be sold as refrigerated food if rapidly cooled to 41°F or below within 2 hours following the restoration of power.
2+		Discard

Prior to resuming operations after a power outage, you should evaluate all potentially hazardous foods and discard any which have been subjected to severe temperature abuse as defined in the tables above. Any products discarded should be denatured sufficiently to prevent accidental consumption. If you are unable to verify the length of time a product spent in the temperature danger zone, it should be discarded. When in doubt, throw it out!

Additional Information

1. American Red Cross - <http://www.redcross.org/prepare/disaster/food-safety>
2. Federal Food Safety Information - http://www.foodsafety.gov/blog/power_outages.html