

# When the Power Goes Back On



By Diane Wright Hirsch, UConn Extension Food Safety Senior Educator

## Cleaning Refrigerators & Freezers

1. Discard all unsafe foods and keep a list of the foods you must throw out—your insurance coverage may allow for reimbursement for some value of the food that must be destroyed as a result of the power failure.
2. Take all safe food out and put it in a cooler.
3. Unplug the appliance(s).
4. Clean all surfaces with a solution of baking soda or dish detergent and hot water.
5. Disinfect with a solution of 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach in a gallon of water.
6. Allow to air dry with the door open.
7. Close doors and plug in the appliance(s).
8. Bring the refrigerator to 40°F or below and the freezer to 0°F before restocking.  
(This is a good time to make sure you have a refrigerator and freezer thermometer in place!)



## Food Contaminated by Flood Water

If your house (and food supply) was damaged by flooding, even non-perishable foods can present a food safety problem. Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water, particularly those that are packed in plastic, paper, cardboard, cloth, or similar containers. If contaminated by flood waters, containers with screw-caps, snap lids, crimped caps, twist caps, flip tops, or those that were at home should be discarded. Do not eat produce from a garden that has been flooded. Again, keep a list of foods that must be destroyed due to flooding.

The United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety Inspection Service (USDA/FSIS) suggests that undamaged, commercially prepared foods in all-metal cans can be saved if you do the following: First, brush or wipe away any dirt or silt, then:

- Remove the labels (if they are the removable kind), since they can harbor dirt and bacteria.
- Thoroughly wash cans or retort (food) pouches with soap and water, using hot water if it is available.
- Rinse the cans or retort pouches with water that is safe for drinking, if available, since dirt or residual soap will reduce the effectiveness of chlorine sanitation.
- Then, sanitize them by immersion in one of the two following ways:
  1. Place in water and allow the water to come to a boil and continue boiling for 2 minutes.
  2. Place in a freshly made solution consisting of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water (or the cleanest, clearest water available) for 15 minutes.
- Air-dry cans or retort pouches for a minimum of 1 hour before opening or storing.
- If the labels were removable, then re-label your cans or retort pouches with a marker, including the expiration date (if available).
- Food in reconditioned cans or retort pouches should be used as soon as possible.



### Sources:

<https://www.fda.gov/food/recallsoutbreaksemergencies/emergencies/ucm2006925.htm>

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/emergency-preparedness/a-consumers-guide-to-food-safety-severe-storms-and-hurricanes/>