

# POWER OUTAGES IN FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS



The following guidance can help retail food establishments protect customers from foodborne illness and minimize inventory loss during power outages.

## BEFORE A POWER OUTAGE

- Consider purchasing a **generator** for emergency use.
- Identify **refrigerated truck** options for extended outages.
- Maintain a list of **emergency contacts**.
- Ensure you have a **corded phone** that does not require electricity.



## DURING A POWER OUTAGE

### COLD FOOD

- Keep refrigerator and freezer **doors closed** as much as possible.
- Group **cold food packages together** and keep raw meat separate.
- Surround food with **ice** and **cover** open display units.

### GENERAL GUIDELINES

- **Monitor the time** since the outage began.
- **Discard food** that hasn't reached its final cooking temperature.

### HOT FOOD

- Do *not* store hot food in refrigerators or freezers.
- Use approved heating methods, such as **canned chafing dish fuel**, to maintain food at or above 135°F.

### STOP FOOD PREPARATION IF:

- Safe temperatures cannot be maintained.
- Hot water or sufficient water pressure is unavailable.
- Proper sanitation of utensils is compromised.
- Lighting is inadequate for safe work.

### TCS FOOD EXAMPLES:

- Meats, eggs, and dairy products
- Cut fruits and vegetables (e.g., leafy greens, tomatoes, melons)
- Moist, non-acidic, and perishable foods (e.g., cooked onions, rice, pasta)

**REMINDER: Keep foods that are  
Time/Temperature Control for Safety (TCS)  
BELOW 41°F or ABOVE 135°F  
AT ALL TIMES.**

# AFTER A POWER OUTAGE

VERIFY CONDITIONS BEFORE RESUMING OPERATIONS.

- **Check temperatures** of all TCS foods.
- **Discard unsafe food** per the provided guidelines below.
- Ensure hot and cold **running water** is restored.
- Confirm all **utilities and equipment** are operational.
- Obtain **approval** from UW Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S) if required.



## COLD FOODS

Time since loss of power	Food temperature 45°F or lower	Food temperature 46°F to 50°F	Food temperature 51°F or higher
0-2 hours	OK	OK	OK
2-4 hours	OK	OK	X
More than 4 hours	OK	X	X

## HOT FOODS

Time since loss of power	Food temperature 130°F or higher	Food temperature 129°F or lower
0-2 hours	OK	OK
2-4 hours	OK	X
More than 4 hours	X	X

**OK**= Food may be sold, as long as it was 41°F or below when the power went out. Immediately cool to 41°F or below.  
**X**= Food may be unsafe and may *not* be sold.

### FOOD DISPOSAL

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

- Document the type and amount of food and the reason for disposal. You may need to provide the information to EH&S
- Contact your garbage company for instructions on disposing of large amounts of food.
- Never dispose of food or beverages in a storm drain or on the ground.

### REFERENCES

[Washington State Department of Health Guidelines](#)

[Stormwater Pollution Prevention](#)

[Building Emergency Procedures: Power Outages](#)

### QUESTIONS?

Contact the Environmental Health & Safety Environmental Public Health Program at [phdept@uw.edu](mailto:phdept@uw.edu) or (206) 616-1623.