

Electrical Outage Guidance for Food Establishments

Food safety may be affected by electrical outages since refrigeration units may not be able to keep foods at safe temperatures, equipment may not be functional, and electric water heaters will not be able to supply hot water. In general, food kept in a refrigerator or freezer should be safe to eat if the power is out for less than two hours. Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed while the power is out to keep the food cold as long as possible. Do not prepare foods that require cooling. If your facility has been without electricity for four hours or more and you have questions, contact the Health Department at FoodLodging@vermont.gov or 802-863-7221.

Hot Water

- Food establishment operations are required to have hot running water at all times for proper hand washing, cleaning, food preparation, etc.
- **If you are experiencing an electric outage and have an electric water heater, you must stop operations until the power is turned back on.**

Equipment

- Check that all equipment is safe, operational and functioning properly.

Ventilation

- Stop cooking operations if the ventilation system is not working properly.

Cooking Equipment

- Stop using hot holding units if they are not working and find another way to either keep food above 135°F or below 41°F.
- Throw away the food if proper cooling methods can't be followed or food will be out of proper temperature for more than four hours.
- Throw away any potentially hazardous foods that were in cooking, cooling, or reheating processes if proper temperatures or time limits were not met. Write down which food was thrown away.
- Stop cooking operations if cooking and holding equipment is not working.

Lighting

- Lights are important for safety and food preparation. It's difficult to properly clean equipment, utensils and surfaces without enough lighting.

Dishwashers

- If the dishwasher is not working, use the three-bay sink to wash, rinse and sanitize utensils and equipment. Hot water must be available for the facility to remain open.
- Use single-service ware until the dishwasher is working again.

Generators

- Generators, pressure washers, or other gasoline-powered tools produce carbon monoxide that can build up to dangerous levels in minutes. Never use gasoline-powered equipment indoors.
- Use single-service ware until the dishwasher is working again.

Refrigeration

- Lights are important for safety and food preparation. It's difficult to properly clean equipment, utensils and surfaces without enough lighting.
- Refrigeration is a necessary part of food safety. Cold foods must be kept at 41 °F or colder to maintain food safety.
 - Write down what time the electricity went out.
 - Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to keep foods cold.
 - Check to make sure the refrigeration unit is working and maintaining proper temperatures after the electricity is turned back on.
 - Throw away potentially hazardous foods that have been out of proper temperatures for more than four hours or if you do not know how long they have been out of proper temperatures. Frozen foods that remain solid can be refrozen if there is no sign of container damage.
 - Write down which food was thrown away.
 - Clean and sanitize food contact surfaces that were contaminated by thawed food before starting food handling operations. This includes ice bins and machines that may have melted during the electrical outage.

Bleach Guidance (8.25%) for Sanitizing Surfaces

Purpose	ppm	Dilution	Contact Time
Food contact surface sanitizer	50 – 200	1 teaspoon bleach / 1 gallon water*+	2 minutes

**Dilution instructions are based on EPA Registration Number 5813-100 labeled instructions for use of Clorox Regular Bleach (8.25% Sodium Hypochlorite). Follow the labeled instructions for sanitizing food contact surfaces and routine disinfection if a different type of bleach is used.*

+Do not use splashless or scented bleach.

Food Product Salvage Evaluation Guide

When in doubt, throw it out! Food must be in good condition to be fit for human consumption. It must not be spoiled, have been kept at proper temperatures, and not be dirty or contaminated. Throw away food according to local rules and ordinances.

Food Product	Action	Explanation/Instruction
Refrigerated foods (PHF, TCS food over 41 °F for more than four hours)	Throw away	
Refrigerated foods at over 41 °F for less than four hours	Salvage	Must be iced or moved to a properly working refrigerator unit.
Frozen foods that remained frozen and did not thaw	Salvage	
Partially thawed frozen foods that remained under 41 °F	Salvage	Must be moved to a properly working refrigerator unit and cooked immediately.
Improperly cooled or hot held foods	Throw away	Food kept in the 41 °F to 135 °F temperature range can make food unsafe to eat.