

LOUISIANA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY AND
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

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Department of Health and Hospitals News Update

Food Safety Stressed during Power Outages

Baton Rouge - The Department of Health and Hospitals is warning the thousands of Louisiana residents currently without power due to Hurricane Gustav not to consume foods spoiled due to prolonged loss of electricity.

Power outages are common occurrences after hurricanes, and that means the contents inside refrigerators and freezers could spoil. A generator can be used to keep refrigerators and freezers running. The generator does not have to run continuously to keep things cold. Be sure and follow safety guidelines regarding the location of a generator to avoid deadly carbon monoxide poisoning.

Here are some proven methods of keeping your food safe during a power outage:

- Avoid opening the refrigerators and freezers just to see how cold the contents are. Perishable food will stay adequately cold for four (4) hours in a refrigerator that is off
- Perishable foods should not be kept if they have been exposed to temperatures exceeding 40 degrees for more than two (2) hours
- Keep a thermometer in the refrigerator and freezer to monitor the temperature. Food in the freezer will continue to be frozen as long as the temperature remains at zero (0) degrees
- A freezer will stay adequately cold for two (2) days if it is full. Freeze jugs of water before losing power to minimize dead air space in the freezer
- Thawed food that contains ice crystals may be refrozen. Thawed food that does not have ice crystals but was kept at 40 degrees or below for no more than one (1) to two (2) days may be cooked, then refrozen
- Never taste food to see if it is safe to eat

The following food should be discarded after being left out more than two (2) hours above 40 degrees:

- Meat, poultry, fish, eggs and egg substitutes (regardless if it is cooked or raw)
- Dairy products
- Casseroles, stews or soups
- Lunch meat and hot dogs
- Creamy salad dressings

- Cheese pies, cream-filled pastries, cookie dough

The following food should be discarded after being left out more than eight (8) hours above 50 degrees:

- Mayonnaise
- Horseradish
- Tartar sauce

Not all foods have to be kept cold, and can be at room temperature for several days. They include:

- Butter or margarine
- Processed and hard cheeses
- Fresh fruits and vegetables, fruit juices
- Vinegar-based salad dressing and sauces
- Ketchup
- Olives
- Peanut butter
- Herbs and spices
- Fruit pies and bread
- Cakes, except cream cheese frosted or cream filled
- Flour and nuts

When choosing foods to stock for a survival kit:

- Select nonperishable food that requires little or no cooking and no refrigeration
- Can or jar sizes should be enough for one meal with no leftovers. Once cans or jars are open, many foods lose their shelf-stable character and will go bad
- Pick food you like and normally eat
- If you do not have a way to boil water if you lose power, do not include instant cooked foods.
- Do not forget baby food, special dietary requirements and pet food
- Practice using a hand-crank can opener to make sure it works before you need it
- Store food in the coolest cabinets away from appliances that produce heat
- Store food contained in cardboard boxes, thin plastic or paper in metal, glass or rigid plastic containers to prevent insect and rodent damage

Follow these guidelines to protect yourself and your family:

- Food that has come in contact with floodwater should be discarded
- If canned food has come in contact with floodwater, remove the labels and wash the cans in a solution of one (1) cup of bleach to a gallon of water
- Throw away canned food if the cans have come open, are bulging or dented
- Do not use contaminated water to brush your teeth, wash your hands or prepare food