

Press Release
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Dealing with Refrigerator-Freezer Outages

Gustav was a grim reminder to everyone in Louisiana that hurricane season is in full swing and Hannah, Ike and Josephine are swirling offshore. Hopefully Louisiana will not have to endure another direct hit like Gustav, although in the Shreveport area we were lucky that there were few incidences of loss of electricity. However, electricity losses can occur in any season as those who have lived here will remember from major ice storms of years past.

You may want to clip this column for reference if you do lose electricity. Following these steps from the LSU AgCenter will help keep your food safe during power outages or other circumstances when your refrigerator and/or freezer don't work:

- While the electricity is off, do not open the refrigerator and freezer doors unless essential.
- Food in a fully stocked freezer usually will remain frozen for two days after power is lost. A half-full freezer will usually keep food frozen for about one day. If the freezer isn't full, quickly move food items together so they will retain cold longer.
- Separate raw meat and poultry items from other foods. Place them on the bottom shelf. This will prevent their juices from leaking onto other foods if they begin to thaw.
- If the power will be out for a longer period than the freezer will maintain the cold, place dry ice in the freezer. Thirty pounds of dry ice should hold a full, normal-size freezer below freezing for at least a couple of days.
- In the refrigerator, highly perishable foods will usually keep 4-6 hours, depending on the room temperature. If the power will be out for longer, block ice or dry ice may be placed in containers in the refrigerator.

After a power outage, there are certain precautions you should take before using food stored in refrigerators and freezers that were off for more than a few hours.

- If ice crystals are still visible and/or the food feels as cold as if refrigerated, it is safe to refreeze. Raw meats and poultry, cheese, juices, breads and pastries can be refrozen without losing a lot of quality. Prepared foods, fish, vegetables and fruits can be refrozen safely, but quality may suffer.
- Remember that seafood and ground meat is vulnerable to quick spoilage.
- If food is thawed and is still cool or has not been at room temperature for more than several hours, cook as soon as possible. Serve or refreeze.
- If the food thawed or was held above 40 degrees F for more than 2 hours, generally it should be discarded because bacteria may multiply to unsafe levels under these conditions. The only foods that can be refrozen under these conditions are well-wrapped hard cheeses, butter and margarine, breads and pastries without custard fillings, fruits and fruit juices that look and smell acceptable.
- Vegetables held above 40 degrees F for less than 6 hours may be refrozen, but with quality loss. Pecans and other nuts may be refrozen safely, but may suffer quality loss.

After you have weathered the storm and the refrigerator is operating again, use these guidelines to decide what to do with foods that were stored in refrigerator:

- Condiments such as ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, pickles, relishes, piquante sauce, oil and vinegar salad dressings as well as steak sauces should be just fine. The acid in them is a natural preservative. Jams, jellies, preserves and syrups are all right, too, because sugar acts as a preservative. However, check for mold growth.
- Hard cheese will be okay. If the temperature did not get too warm inside the refrigerator, blocks or slices of processed cheese can also be used. Well-wrapped butter and margarine can usually be kept as long as they do not melt, but should be discarded if rancid odors develop.

- Fresh fruits and vegetables are safe as long as they are firm and show no evidence of mold. Juices are safe as long as there is no evidence of mold growth and they look and smell acceptable.
- Pecans, peanuts and peanut butter also are safe. Cured meats and lunch meats are okay if still cold and do not feel slimy to touch.
- Eggs are okay if still cool.

To be prepared for future outages:

Place two or three ice cubes in a plastic freezer bag and seal. Keep this in the freezer at all times. In an upright freezer, you can have a test bag on each shelf. If there is a power outage you will know if the interior temperature was above 32° F if the cubes melt. If the cubes are melted, quickly determine the temperature of the water in the bag and you will know the temperature inside the freezer.

Remember, these are guidelines only and your own good judgment will be the final determination in whether to keep or discard foods when your refrigerator or freezer fails. Our rule at the LSU AgCenter is “if in doubt, throw it out.”