

## **What to do with Food when the Power Goes Out!**

Perishable food is safe at room temperature for 2 hours when the temperature is below 80 degrees F. Above that temperature, you only have one hour before bacteria start to grow in unrefrigerated food.

Keep your refrigerator and freezer closed. Open the doors as little as possible. An unopened refrigerator should keep foods cold for up to four hours; but you will need to evaluate each item individually.

A freezer that is half full should keep foods frozen for 24 hours; a full freezer should keep foods frozen for 48 hours.

You can cover your fridge and freezer with thick blankets to try to insulate them and keep them as cool as possible.

If the power outages last longer than 4 hours, remove milk, meat, and dairy products from the fridge and pack them into a cooler with lots of ice.

Having an instant read food thermometer is crucial to determining food safety even after the power comes back on. If refrigerated products are still below 40 degrees, they should be safe. If they are above 40 they must be cooked and eaten immediately or thrown out.

**The most basic rule: When in doubt, throw it out.** Any cost savings you may gain by keeping questionable food will cost you much more in terms of doctor and hospital bills if someone gets sick and in a major emergency there may not be a doctor available.

Remember that cooking outside during a power outage on your charcoal or gas grill is a great way to keep the temperature in your kitchen as cool as possible.

~Linda~ busycooks.about.com (Used, edited, and amended by Prepare Northwest)

## **Storing Emergency Food**

The key to long term food storage is temperature. When talking about plant seeds the USDA recognizes that for each 10.08 F drop in temperature it doubles the storage life of seeds. The US military also uses a temperature exposure matrix to determine the safe life expectancy for Meals Ready to Eat (MRE's). While predicting actual shelf life of food is not an exact science, it has been shown that the lower the constant temperature food is stored at, the longer shelf life it has and the more nutritional value that remains in the food.

When selecting a location to store emergency foods look for the following:

- Cool steady temperature
- Dry/low humidity
- Easy access – near an entry or exit point
- Away from any stored chemical products
- Elevated off of the floor
- Dark – or at least out of direct sunlight

Again it cannot be stated boldly enough, when in doubt, throw it out!

Some suggestions for consideration:

- A new, clean garbage can with wheels and a tightly fitting lid make a nice storage unit that can be rolled away in the event you must leave.
- Extra ziplock style bags of all sizes make great containers to mix ingredients together, store leftovers, distribute portions etc.
- Do not store food with other emergency supplies. Many items needed in an emergency contain hazardous chemicals and can contaminate food over time.