

During the winter months, high winds, snow, or ice may cause wide spread power outages leaving many people unable to cook or shop. For these reasons, it is a good to plan ahead for neighborhood power outages. The United States Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, has a comprehensive website www.ready.gov which can help you prepare for emergencies including power outages. Having an emergency food kit in your home for such occurrences is one of the best ways to be prepared.

Power outages may last for several days so it is wise to prepare at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food for each family member. Be sure to include a manual can opener and eating utensils. Choose foods your family will eat, remember any special dietary needs, and avoid foods that will make you thirsty. Of note, commercially canned food may be eaten out of the can without warming.

Here are some examples of foods to stock:

- commercially canned foods (such as meat/poultry/fish, fruits, vegetables)
- dry cereal or granola
- peanut butter or other type of nut/seed butter
- dried fruit
- salt-free crackers
- non-perishable pasteurized milk
- high energy foods or bars
- vitamins
- bottled water
- infant formula (if needed).

Without electricity or a cold source, food stored in refrigerators and freezers can become unsafe. Bacteria in food grow rapidly at temperatures between 40 and 140 °F, and if these foods are consumed, people can become very sick.

When the Power Goes Out:

- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- The refrigerator will keep food cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened.
- Refrigerators should be kept at 40° F or below for proper food storage.

Once the Power is Restored:

- Check the temperature inside the refrigerator and freezer.
- If an appliance thermometer was kept in the freezer, check the temperature when the power comes back on. If the freezer thermometer reads 40° F or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen. If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine its safety. You can't rely on appearance or odor. If the food still contains ice crystals or is 40° F or below, it is safe to refreeze or cook.
- Refrigerated food should be safe as long as the power was out for no more than 4 hours. Keep the door closed as much as possible.
- Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs or leftovers) that has been above 40° F for two hours or more.

Using Dry Ice:

- Under normal circumstances you should not keep dry ice in your freezer. If your freezer is functioning properly it will cause the unit to become too cold and your freezer may shut off. However, if you lose power for an extended period of time, dry ice is the best ways to keep things cold.
- Twenty-five pounds of dry ice will keep a 10-cubic-foot freezer below freezing for 3-4 days.
- If you use dry ice to keep your food cold, make sure it does not come in direct contact with the food.
- Use care when handling dry ice, wear dry, heavy gloves to avoid injury.