Safety of Frozen Foods after a Power Failure

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If flood water enters your freezer or refrigerator, dispose of all food regardless of the container it was stored in.

If power is interrupted, or the refrigerator or freezer is not working properly for a short period of time, keep the door closed to keep cold air inside. This helps prevent food spoilage or thawing. Freezers and refrigerators should be equipped with thermometers.

When anticipating a power failure (as prior to a flood warning), set the refrigerator and freezer temperature to the coldest setting to build up a cooling reserve.

Check with your insurance agent to determine if the contents of your refrigerator or freezer are covered under your homeowner’s policy.

**Foods in the Freezer**

***Thawing rate***

With the door closed, food in most high efficiency freezers will stay below 40°F up to 3 days, even in summer. Thawing rate depends on:

1. The amount of food in the freezer. A full freezer stays cold longer than one partially full.
2. The kind of food. A freezer filled with meat stays cold longer than a freezer filled with baked goods, or less dense food items.
3. The temperature of the food. The colder the food, the longer it will stay frozen.
4. Size of freezer. The larger the freezer, the longer food stays frozen.
5. Where the freezer is located; if inside a heated garage or if the surrounding temperature is high, the contents will thaw more quickly. Remember cold is the absence of heat. Even direct sunlight will cause the freezer to warm up.

**Emergency measures**

1. Keep the door closed.
2. If possible, move food to another freezer where the owner has power. To move food safely, wrap it in newspapers or blankets, or place it in insulated coolers.
3. If you can't take food to another location, leave it in your freezer, and cover freezer with blankets, quilts, crumpled newspapers.
4. Use dry ice if it is available. Wear gloves to handle dry ice and proceed as recommended (see fact sheet, Using Dry Ice During a Power Failure).
5. Check with your insurance provider to see if the freezer contents are covered by your homeowner’s policy.

***When food has thawed***

You may safely refreeze some foods if they still contain ice crystals or if they have been kept at 40°F or below for no more than 2 days. If the temperature of the food reaches 50°F, throw food away.

*Canning:* Foods that cannot be refrozen but are safe to use may be canned immediately using appropriate canning processes.

*Consumption*: If the duration of the power outage is expected to exceed the safe shelf life of the frozen food, consume it first before using canned foods. Frozen fruits and vegetables can be cooked over the grill and shared with neighbors who many not have sufficient food reserves.

Treat completely thawed foods as follows:

1. *Fruits*. Refreeze fruits if they taste and smell good. Fruit that is beginning to ferment is safe to eat but will have an off-flavor. Such fruit could be used in cooking.
2. Do not refreeze frozen dinners that have thawed.
3. *Vegetables*. Do not refreeze thawed vegetables. Bacteria in these foods multiply rapidly. Spoilage may begin before bad odors develop. Such spoilage may be very toxic. If you question the condition of any vegetables, throw them out.
4. *Meat and poultry*. Examine each package of thawed meat or poultry. If odor is offensive or questionable, or if the meat temperature has exceeded 40°F for 12 hours don't use. Discard all stuffed poultry. Again, if a barbeque grill is available, cook thawed meat as you would normally for immediate consumption or to provide to neighbors to preserve non-frozen foods for later use.
5. *Fish and shellfish*. These are extremely perishable. Do not refreeze. Seafood may be spoiled, even if it has no offensive odor. Discard if there is any uncertainty of its safety.
6. *Ice cream*. Do not refreeze melted ice cream. Consume before it thaws.

Cook thawed frozen foods and frozen dinners immediately if they are still cold. Do not refreeze. If any foods have an offensive or questionable odor, do not eat.

*Community sharing.* There are many accounts of neighbors who have lost power bringing their frozen food together for community meals. A large kettle over a fire or turkey fryer can provide a great means of safely cooking nutritious soups and stews comprised of vegetables and meats from each other’s freezers. Even the accumulated ice on the inside walls of the freezer can be used to provide the needed liquid for cooking.