

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

June 22, 2016

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

What to Do About Food When You Have No Power

Coldwater, MI. Power outages from weather emergencies compromise the safety of stored food, but consumers can take steps to reduce food waste and the risk of foodborne illness. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency suggests you take the following steps to keep your food safe during a power outage:

Steps to consider when preparing for severe weather that could cause a power outage:

- Keep appliance thermometers in both the refrigerator and the freezer to ensure temperatures remain food safe during a power outage. Safe temperatures are 41°F or lower in the refrigerator, 0°F or lower in the freezer.
- Freeze water in one-quart plastic storage bags or small containers prior to a storm. These containers are small enough to fit in around the food in the refrigerator and freezer to help keep food cold. Remember, water expands when it freezes so don't overfill the containers.
- Freeze refrigerated items, such as leftovers, milk and fresh meat and poultry that you may not need immediately—this helps keep them at a safe temperature longer.
- Know where you can get dry ice or block ice.
- Have coolers on hand to keep refrigerator food cold if the power will be out for more than four hours.

- Group foods together in the freezer—this ‘igloo’ effect helps the food stay cold longer.
- Keep a few days’ worth of ready-to-eat foods that do not require cooking or cooling.
- Consider having charcoal or propane gas on hand for outdoor cooking in case a power outage disrupts your electric stove or microwave.

Steps to follow after a weather emergency:

- Check the temperature inside of your refrigerator and freezer. Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, seafood, eggs or leftovers) that has been above 41°F for two hours or more.
- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. A refrigerator will keep food cold for about 4 hours if the door is kept closed. A full freezer will hold its temperature for about 48 hours (24 hours if half-full).
- Place meat and poultry to one side of the freezer or on a tray to prevent cross contamination of thawing juices.
- Use dry or block ice to keep the refrigerator as cold as possible during an extended power outage. Fifty pounds of dry ice should keep a fully-stocked 18-cubic-foot freezer cold for two days
- Check each item separately. Throw out any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture or feels warm to the touch.
- Check frozen food for ice crystals. The food in your freezer that partially or completely thawed may be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is 41°F or below.
- Never taste a food to decide if it’s safe.

REMEMBER: When in doubt, throw it out!

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency offers the following FAQs on its websites that provide tips to help you through a weather emergency:

- Food Safety: When to Keep It, When to Toss It Out
- Power Outage: Food and Water
- Power Outage: Other Concerns

To access these FAQs or many other, just go to www.bhsj.org and click on the **'Frequently Asked Questions'** button at the top on the side bar; or stop in at one of our 3 locations:

Branch County
570 N. Marshall Rd.
Coldwater, MI 49036
(517) 279-9561, ext. 0106#

Hillsdale County
20 Care Drive
Hillsdale, MI 49242
(517) 437-7395, 0311#

Three Rivers
1110 Hill St.
Three Rivers, MI 49093
(269) 273-2161, 0233#

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