San Luis Obispo County

Environmental Health Services

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PROCEDURES FOR FOOD FACILITIES IN THE EVENT OF A MAJOR DISASTER OR EMERGENCY

During a major disaster water, sewer, and natural gas lines can rupture and break. Also, electrical and power supply lines are often broken and services interrupted. Given these potential problems, the following guidelines should be followed:

1. **WATER SERVICE PROBLEMS**: If water service is interrupted or contaminated, water from these lines cannot be used for drinking, making ice, or cooking. Water lines to buildings that supply drinking fountains, coffee machines, soft drink/soda machines, and ice machines with water, cannot be used for human consumption. If they do, there is a great risk of illness or death due to the contamination of the water source.

   SOLUTION: Discontinue preparing and serving unpackaged food and use bottled water to wash hands. Otherwise, the food facility needs to immediately close and contact our Department for approval prior to re-opening.

2. **ELECTRICAL PROBLEMS**: If the electrical supply is interrupted or completely out, food stored in refrigerators or freezers may spoil, depending on the duration of the power outage. If the power is out, DO NOT OPEN the units if possible. An unopened refrigerator should be able to maintain a temperature of 41ºF or below for up to 4 hours. A refrigerator whose door has been opened may maintain this temperature for less than 2 hours. Readily perishable foods can generally be kept at room temperature for up to an hour without spoilage or potential health problems. (We are not approving readily perishable foods to be stored at room temperature. Under the California Health and Safety code, they must be maintained at 41ºF or below, or 135ºF or above at all times. This applies only to disaster situations). Frozen foods once thawed should not be refrozen.

   SOLUTION: Try to keep readily perishable foods at 41ºF or below. Use clean uncontaminated ice to help keep these foods at the proper temperature. Do not use for human consumption if they have been above 41ºF for over two hours. Any spoiled foods should be put into sealed plastic garbage bags and disposed of in the dumpster. Make sure the dumpster lids are closed to prevent fly breeding and access by rodents.

3. **SEWAGE PROBLEMS**: If the sewer line has been ruptured or broken, any water or sewage from the food facility may either start backing up inside the facility or start overflowing out the facility, or both. .

SOLUTION: Immediately discontinue the use of all toilet facilities, and any discharges of wastewater. The food facility must immediately close and contact our Department for approval prior to reopening. Try to contain sewage discharges outside the building to prevent risk to the public, and use any chlorine or bleach to help disinfect the area. Any food, including cans or bottles, contaminated by the sewage must be properly disposed of in the dumpsters and CANNOT be washed and reused. All floors and contaminated equipment must be properly cleaned and disinfected.

4. **GAS LINE PROBLEMS**: If gas lines ruptured and service is interrupted, some equipment in the food facility will not be functional including stoves, steam tables, and the hot water heater.

   SOLUTION: Discontinue preparing unpackaged foods if there is no hot water available. Food facilities will have a problem operating without natural gas service. Any multi-use utensils, such as plates and silverware cannot be properly washed or sanitized. Single service utensils will have to be used, such as paper or plastic plates, cups, knives, forks, and spoons.

5. **FIRES**: Fires are sometimes caused during an earthquake or other disaster.

   SOLUTION: If your food facility is involved in a fire, it must be closed immediately and inspected by our Department prior to reopening.