



**COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO HEALTH AGENCY  
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES DIVISION**

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## **FOOD SAFETY RELATED TO POWER OUTAGES**

With potential electricity shortages facing San Luis Obispo County, Environmental Health Services offers the following food safety tips to prevent food-borne illness in the event of power outages:

- **Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed.** Keep potentially hazardous foods, such as meat or poultry, chilled to 41°F or less.
- **Do not place hot or unrefrigerated foods in the refrigerator once the power has gone out.** It will raise the temperature inside the unit. Chill food with ice baths as needed. Any foods that were prepared prior to the power outage that were not rapidly cooled should be discarded.
- If the freezer is not full, group packages together so they will retain the cold more effectively. Without power, a full freezer will keep everything frozen for about 2 days. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen 1 day.
- If you have advance warning of a power outage and if the outage is anticipated to last more than 4 hours move foods that must be refrigerated to the freezer as space will allow.
- If necessary, use block ice or bagged ice for supplemental cooling.
- Keep meat and poultry items separated from other foods so if they begin to thaw, their juices will not drip on to other foods.
- Discard any thawed food that has risen to room temperature and remained there for four (4) hours or more.
- Some facilities may need to arrange for temporary refrigerated storage units during a prolonged power outage. (e.g., mobile units/trailers).
- Be aware of the asphyxiation, skin contact, and other risks of using dry ice. Do not store it in confined areas with limited ventilation. This includes cold rooms and walk-in refrigerators. Never store dry ice in a tightly sealed container, such as a plastic or glass bottle, or any container with a screw-top lid that will not vent.
- **Kitchen ventilation units will shut off during power outages. Be advised that there have been reports of smoke, heat and grease emissions setting off alarm and fire suppression systems.**

### **WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**

When the power comes back on, all potentially hazardous foods must be evaluated for proper temperatures. Bacteria can multiply rapidly on potentially hazardous foods that have been at room temperature for more than 4 hours. Thawed foods that are at 41°F or below should be used as soon as possible. Do not refreeze thawed foods. Cook foods to proper temperatures to ensure food safety.

**Please be advised that a power outage increases the risk of food borne illness and food preparation should cease until power is fully restored. Permitted food facilities with questions regarding food safety should contact your area Environmental Health Specialist, our information desk at (805) 781-5544. Operators may also visit our web site at [www.slocounty.ca.gov/ehs](http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/ehs) or [Food Safety During Power Outage | FoodSafety.gov](http://FoodSafetyDuringPowerOutage|FoodSafety.gov) for additional information.**