

FEATURE – USDA FOOD SAFETY ADVICE AFTER FLOOD & POWER LOSS

INTRO: When natural disasters strike your home, will the food in your kitchen be safe? US Dept of Agriculture experts have the answers. USDA's Pat O'Leary explains. (1:59)

ADD TO THE LIST OF ISSUES CAUSED BY HURRICANE WINDS AND FLOOD WATERS: FOOD SAFETY EXPERTS WITH THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE SAY IF YOU'VE LOST POWER FOR DAYS, THE FOOD IN YOUR REFRIGERATOR IS PROBABLY NOT SAFE AND SHOULD BE THROWN AWAY. FOR SHORTER OUTAGES FOLLOW THIS ADVICE.

Kathy Bernard: When the power goes out the most important thing you can do is to keep the doors of the refrigerator and the freezer closed. You want to keep the cold air in there as long as possible to keep the food safe. The refrigerator will probably stay safe for only about four hours after losing power if you keep the door closed. A fully stocked freezer should stay safe for about two days if you don't open the door. If it's half full then it's safe for about a day. If it looks like the power is going to be out for an extended period of time, hopefully you can buy some blocks of ice and put them in the refrigerator and put some dry ice in the freezer to extend that time period. You can also take the items and put them into a cooler with ice or frozen gel packs.

KEEP REFRIGERATED FOODS AT FORTY DEGREES FAHRENHEIT OR BELOW AND FROZEN FOODS AT ZERO DEGREES FAHRENHEIT OR BELOW. AND REMEMBER, IF YOUR HOME HAS SURVIVED A FLOOD, THE FOOD IN YOUR REFRIGERATOR MAY NOT HAVE..

Kathy: Flood waters can contain lots of harmful bacteria. Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come in contact with flood water.

METAL PANS AND UTENSILS, CERAMIC DISHES AND UNDAMAGED METAL FOOD CONTAINERS THAT HAVE COME IN CONTACT WITH FLOOD WATER CAN BE CLEANED AND SANITIZED.

Kathy: But any plastic cookware, and especially things like baby bottles and pacifiers should always be discarded.

FOR INFORMATION ON HOW TO KNOW WHAT FOODS TO KEEP OR DISCARD AND HOW TO CLEAN AND SANITIZE ITEMS, READ ABOUT EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS ON USDA'S FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE WEB SITE. THE EXPERTS SAY THESE PRECAUTIONS CAN HELP PREVENT FOODBORNE ILLNESS CAUSED BY BACTERIA - BUT:

Kathy: If you're not sure if a food is safe, don't take a chance. When in doubt, just throw it out.

LEARN MORE ON THE WEB AT FSIS.USDA.GOV OR ASKKAREN.GOV. OR
CALL THE USDA'S MEAT & POULTRY HOTLINE AT 1-888-MPHOTLINE. FOR
THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M PAT O'LEARY.