

Safe Foods after a Disaster

General



Storm-damaged foods may not be safe to eat. If you have a question about the safety of any item, dispose of it.

Otherwise, keep the following points in mind:

Tips

- Destroy the following foods if they have been covered by flood waters: fresh fruits and vegetables; foods in cardboard or paper cartons; foods in bags, such as rice and flour; foods, liquids or beverages in crown-capped bottles or containers with pull-tops, corks or screw caps. This includes canned foods in glass jars, whether you bought them or canned them yourself.
- Destroy all foods that were covered by water which may have been contaminated with industrial waste. This includes those foods sealed in unopened cans.
- Foods in sealed cans not fouled by industrial waste may be safe to eat if the cans don't have bulges or leaks, but you must first disinfect the cans before you open them.
- To disinfect cans, remove labels and wash the containers with soap or detergent. Rinse in a chlorine bleach solution using two tablespoons of household laundry bleach to each gallon of water. Rinse containers in clean water, dry and relabel them. The cans can also be sterilized by covering with water and boiling for at least 10 minutes.

Frozen Foods

In the event of a power failure, frozen or refrigerated foods warmed to above 40 F for two to three hours may not be safe to eat.

Once-frozen foods which have thawed completely and warmed to temperatures above 40 F should be cooked or eaten immediately or discarded. After cooking, items can be refrozen.

Partially thawed frozen foods with ice crystals may be safely refrozen.

Breads can be refrozen as well as fruits and vegetables that are still at or below 40 degrees.

Discard all stuffed poultry.

Do not refreeze frozen dinners that have thawed.

Discard any meat that has a questionable odor or has reached 40 F for two hours.

Foods in a freezer without power may stay frozen from one to three days, depending on these conditions:

1. The door must remain closed.
2. The freezer must be mostly full.
3. The temperature outside must be moderate.
4. The freezer must be large and well-insulated.

Dry ice can be placed in a freezer on boards or heavy paper on top of packages to keep temperatures below freezing. Allow 2.5 to three pounds of dry ice per cubic foot of space. More will be needed in an upright freezer, because dry ice should be placed on each shelf. Dry ice can cause burns, don't handle dry ice with bare hands.

Save liquids from canned vegetables to substitute for water in cooked dishes.

Juices from canned fruits can be used as salad dressing or as a beverage.

If you can't reach the county Extension office, you can get up-to-date information on food safety from

the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline, (800) 535-4555, from 10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Eastern, Monday through Friday, or the FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition Hotline, (800) 332-4010, from noon to 4 p.m. Eastern, Monday through Friday.

Based on information developed by Clemson Cooperative Extension following Hurricane Hugo. Revised for Virginia audiences by Virginia Cooperative Extension.

For more information, contact your local office of Virginia Cooperative Extension.

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