



## How to Keep Food Safe During a Power Outage



Photo credit Tami Reece

*We had little rain in February. Drought can increase risk for wildfires. What can I do to keep food safe during planned or unplanned power outages? Debbie V., Paso Robles*

Regional power outages can result from earthquakes, wildfires, or power shutdowns to prevent fires. Transformer failures, vehicle accidents involving power poles, even bird interactions with power lines are other causes. Power outages can be large, affecting multiple communities, or they can be small as when an old freezer quits working on the weekend and the nearest appliance dealer is 25 miles away.

Regardless of the cause, the feeling of panic is the same. *How long will my refrigerated and frozen food be safe? What can I do to keep food safe?* It is important to prepare yourself before an outage occurs. First, keep an appliance thermometer in your refrigerator and freezer to help you know and safely set the temperature of your appliance before an outage, and once power has been restored. This will help you determine if your food is safe. Your refrigerator should be set at 40°F or below and your freezer at 0°F or below. Then remember USDA's 4-hour rule. Your refrigerator will keep food safe for up to 4 hours during a power outage. After 4 hours without power, discard refrigerated perishable food such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs and leftovers. Never taste foods to determine their safety! You often cannot see, smell, or taste bacteria and viruses in food that can make you ill.

A full freezer will keep frozen food at a safe temperature for up to 2 full days (or only one day) if it's less full. Keeping several containers of clean drinking water in the freezer on a regular

basis will help keep food cold in your freezer, refrigerator, or in a cooler when power is out, and they provide backup drinking water in case your water supply is compromised.

As soon as power is restored, check the temperature of your refrigerator and freezer. If the power was out for less than 4 hours and you've kept the door closed, your food should be safe. Check the thermometer to make sure. Refer to [www.Foodsafety.gov](http://www.Foodsafety.gov) and [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov) for more information about food safety during power outages. It's important to remember "When in Doubt, Throw it Out!"

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