

Michigan State University Extension-Oakland County

Power Outages and Your Food



What to Do If Your Power is Out

If you have lost your power, try and find out when the power will be restored. Do not open your refrigerator or freezer doors. A full freezer will keep food safely frozen for two days without power. A half full freezer will keep food safely frozen for one day without power. Refrigerated food will stay sufficiently cooled for safety for four to six hours without power. Opening the refrigerator or freezer doors cuts these times in half every time they are opened.

If you believe the power will be out longer than the time your food can safely be stored in your refrigerator or freezer, you may need to move it to a friend or relative's working refrigerator or freezer. Another option is to purchase dry ice to keep your freezer cold. Dry ice is solid carbon dioxide. It is very cold and must be handled carefully to prevent injury. Twenty five pounds of dry ice will keep food in a 10 cubic foot freezer frozen for 3-4 days.

Always wear protective gloves when handling dry ice or severe frostbite can occur. Never touch dry ice with exposed skin. Place several layers of newspaper or cardboard between the dry ice and food in the freezer. Wrap the dry ice in paper.

Dry ice will produce vapors that can cause breathing problems so do not put your head in the freezer when using dry ice. Also, if you are using dry ice, when you open the freezer door, step back for a moment and let those vapors exit the freezer so as to let the vapors escape. Place the dry ice on top of food in the freezer.

To keep perishable foods from the refrigerator safe, use an ice chest with block ice. The water from the melting ice should be drained often from the ice chest.

When your power comes back on, check the temperature of the refrigerator with an appliance thermometer. If it is above 40 degrees F. You cannot assume perishable foods are safe for consumption. Perishable foods include eggs, dairy, meats, cut produce and any mayonnaise based condiments.

For more information or questions on food safety, call the Oakland County Food Safety and Nutrition Hotline at 248-858-0904