



Mason County

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION

## **WSU Making A Difference**

### **Food Safety Tips After A Power Outage**

Over the past several months Western Washington has encountered several storms that have caused sudden wide spread power outages throughout Mason County. Outages of any length can be frustrating and troublesome, and prolonged ones can be dangerous. When your refrigerator and freezer goes out, special food safety measures must be taken.

Most refrigerated foods are safe if the power outage was only 2-3 hours. Discard any perishable food (such as milk, meat, poultry, fish, eggs and leftovers) that have been above 40°F for more than 2 hours. Refrigerated foods that can be held at temperatures above 40°F until power returns include: hard cheeses, butter, margarine, fresh fruits, fruit juice, fresh unpeeled vegetables, salad dressing, ketchup, mustard, olives, pickles, jams, jellies and peanut butter. For power outages lasting several days, most refrigerated foods should be discarded. If you are unsure how long products have been held above 40°F, DISCARD the products. Foodborne pathogens can grow very quickly in some foods held above refrigeration temperatures; visual appearance and odor cannot be used to assess the safety of food products.

Frozen foods that still contain ice crystals can be refrozen safely. Thawed fruits, fruit juices and fruit pies will be safe to eat; however, discard these products if they have come in contact with thawed meat drippings or if they have signs of spoilage, such as off-odors due to fermentation. All other thawed foods should be discarded.

During a power outage, do not open the refrigerator or freezer. An unopened refrigerator will maintain a cold temperature for approximately 4 hours. A freezer that is half-full will hold freezing temperatures for up to 24 hours and a full freezer for 48 hours. It is recommended to have appliance thermometers in refrigerators and freezers to help assess product safety.

If it looks like the power outage will be for more than 2-4 hours, pack important items in your refrigerator, such as milk, dairy products, meats, fish, poultry, eggs, and leftovers into your cooler surrounded by ice. Keep temperatures at or below 40°F. Throw away any items that have been exposed to temperatures greater than 40°F for more than two hours. Dry ice can also be used to keep foods cold. Handle dry ice with caution. Separate dry ice from food products using a piece of cardboard; place dry ice on top of the cardboard. Fifty pounds of dry ice will keep a

full, 18-cubic foot freezer cold for two days (a general rule of thumb is to allow 2-3 pounds of dry ice per cubic foot of freezer space).

To prepare for a power outage, have one or more coolers. Inexpensive Styrofoam coolers can do an excellent job. Have shelf-stable foods, such as canned goods and powdered or boxed milk. A digital quick response thermometer, which should be a necessity in your kitchen. With these thermometers you can quickly check the internal temperatures of food for doneness and safety.

Reminder, **never taste food to determine its safety!** You can't rely on appearance or odor to determine whether food is safe. Further information on food safety during a power outage can be found at [https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/refridg\\_food.html](https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/refridg_food.html)

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**For more information regarding the Mason County WSU Extension office call (360) 427-9670 Ext. 680, or visit their website at <http://mason.wsu.edu>**

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