

LIGHTS OUT: WHAT TO DO IN A POWER FAILURE

By Steve Burns

Monday, September 28, 2009



When the lights go out it can have a huge impact on restaurant operations, customers and revenues.

To lessen the impact of a power outage, it's important to have a plan in place. A preparedness plan includes the steps taken before, during and after an outage.

BEFORE AN OUTAGE

Have a back-up source supply of lighting and fresh potable water to carry the restaurant through at least one meal period, which approximates four hours.

WHEN THE POWER GOES OFF

Make a note of when the power failure first began. Some power failures can be intermittent while others are long lasting. Keeping track of when it first occurred is critical.

Discontinue all food preparation and ensure all prepared foods are properly covered.

If one hour or more has passed, dispose of all prepared foods not in refrigerated storage.

If less than one hour has passed, reheat all cooked foods to an internal temperature of 74 C (at a minimum) for at least 15 seconds and hold at a temperature of 60 C or greater. These foods must be served within two hours or discarded.

In the refrigerators and freezers, group together – but keep separated – all packaged ready-to-eat foods, cooked foods and raw foods. This will help reduce heat gain in the unit. If necessary, store raw foods on lower shelves, prepared foods on middle shelves and packaged, ready-to-eat foods

on top shelves. This will help prevent cross-contamination.

Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to help retain coolness. If freezer doors remain closed, food should remain frozen for 24 hours.

WHEN POWER IS RESTORED

If power is restored within four hours, check the internal temperature of all perishable foods using an approved food-grade thermometer. If there is no way to verify the internal temperature did not exceed 4 C for more than two hours, food should be discarded. Remember the golden rule: If in doubt, throw it out.

All foods that still contain ice crystals can be safely refrozen; however, partial thawing and refreezing may reduce quality.

Meat proteins, (beef, pork and poultry) that have thawed but did not exceed 4 C can be safely refrozen or cooked to the required internal temperature.

Fish and shellfish, prepared vegetables, starches (for example, rice, beans and pastas), frozen dinners and ice cream should be discarded.

Whole, non-cut fruits and vegetables, hard cheeses such as cheddar, parmesan, Romano and Swiss, bread and baked products and condiments such as ketchup, mustard, pickles and relish can be safely stored above 4 C for 24 hours.

Most pre-packaged, prepared foods can be safely stored above 4 C for 24 hours.

If any food item has dripped juices onto another food product then that product must be discarded.

After the crisis has passed be sure to properly clean and sanitize all food preparation contact surfaces and equipment and storage units before preparing or adding new supplies to the inventory.

Steve Burns is president of [Surety Food Safety Group Inc.](http://www.suretygroup.net) Since its inception in 2001, Surety Food Safety Group has been providing superior services to the food manufacturing, distribution, sales and services sectors in the areas of needs assessment, training and certification in food safety, HACCP program development and implementation as well as food safety audits. For more information, contact Steve at 1.800.291.0019 or info@suretygroup.net.