



# MONTEREY COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

## Environmental Health

### Guidelines for Food Safety at Retail Establishments During Power Outages

The County of Monterey, Environmental Health Branch, developed this guidance document for the retail food industry on what to do when a power outage occurs. This guideline is provided to assist retail food facilities in safe food handling during power outages.

Always be prepared. Have a written contingency plan that is developed ahead of time in the event of a power outage or other natural disasters. What will be your standard operating procedures during an event of this type? Make sure your staff is knowledgeable and trained to respond to a power outage or other natural disaster events and know where to find these procedures should they need to reference them. The focus is on the action steps to take for potentially hazardous foods (PHF), which are those foods that can support the rapid growth of microorganisms at temperatures between 41° F - 135° F. Develop a plan of action on how to keep refrigerated foods cool in your facility. This may include consolidating foods into insulated containers or walk-in coolers, covering open display cases, and purchasing ice or dry ice from local retailers. You should also keep a supply of ice or gel packs frozen and readily accessible. Calibrated food thermometers, a battery-operated clock and a temperature log will help you monitor and document the temperature of the food and the time it spent in the temperature danger zone.

## During a Power Outage

**\*\*\* IF THERE IS NO ELECTRICITY, YOU MUST CLOSE AND STOP ALL FOOD PREPARATION \*\*\***

- Immediately stop taking in new customers and close when the current customers are finished with their meals.
- Do not prepare food if you cannot properly wash your hands, clean and sanitize food contact surfaces, or maintain other required food safety practices.
- Your focus during a power outage is to keep foods out of the temperature danger zone as much as possible. Below are some action steps to take for both cold and hot foods:

### Cold Foods

- Document the time the outage began.
- Document the temperature of food item.
- Keep all cold holding units closed.
- Use ice, gel packs, or dry ice to keep foods cold.
- Hot foods may be chilled with ice baths.
- Do not accept perishable food deliveries.
- Stop all cooking activities when ventilation for cooking equipment is not functional.



### Hot Foods

- Document the time the outage began.
- Document the temperature of food item
- Discard any foods in the process of being cooked that had not reached their appropriate final cooking temperature.
- Cover hot food display cases with thermal blankets or lids to reduce the temperature loss.



## When Power is Restored

**\*\*\* WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT \*\*\***

The steps to take after a power outage will vary, depending on the length of time your facility was without power and how effectively you were able to keep your food out of the temperature danger zone.

- Table 1 will help you decide how to handle refrigerated potentially hazardous foods.

Duration of Outage (hours)	Temperature of Food When Power Returns		
	41°F or below	42°F to 49°F	50°F or above
0-2	PHF can be sold	Cool PHF to 41°F or below within 2 hours	Discard
2-3		Cool PHF to 41°F or below within 1 hour	
4+		Discard	

- Table 2 is for potentially hazardous foods held in hot cases.

Duration of Outage (hours)	Temperature of Food When Power Returns	
	135°F or above	134°F or below
0-2	PHF can be sold	1. May be sold if reheated to 165°F and then held at 135°F or above; or 2. May be sold as refrigerated food if rapidly cooled to 41°F or below within 2 hours following the restoration of power.
2+		Discard

Prior to resuming operations after a power outage, you should evaluate all potentially hazardous foods and discard any which have been subjected to severe temperature abuse as defined in the tables above. Any products discarded should be denatured sufficiently to prevent accidental consumption. If you are unable to verify the length of time a product spent in the temperature danger zone, it should be discarded.

- If food inside a freezer has thawed, but not exceeded 41° F, it must be cooked or stored inside an operating refrigerator. Thawed food must never be refrozen.
- Foods such as meat, poultry, seafood, soft cheese, leftovers, and other similar potentially hazardous foods should be discarded if they are held above 41° F for more than 2 hours.

## Disposal of Food

Please be advised that a power outage increases the risk of foodborne illness and food preparation should cease until power is fully restored. Potentially Hazardous Food that has been subjected to unsafe temperatures prior to or during the power outage might not be safe to eat even if the procedures in the tables are followed.

- If it is determined that food must be discarded, document the type and amount of food and the reason for disposal for insurance and regulatory purposes.
- Small volumes of food to be discarded can be denatured with a cleaning product (such as bleach) and placed in the outside refuse bin.
- To discard large volumes of food, contact your refuse disposal company or your local landfill operator for disposal instructions.

- If there are any questions regarding the safety of specific foods, contact the Environmental Health Department.

### Questions or Additional Information?

Contact Monterey County Health Department Staff  
Mondays through Fridays between 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM:

- **Monterey Office**
  - **Address:** 1200 Aguajito Rd, Monterey, CA, 93940
  - **Phone:** 831 – 647 - 7654
- **Salinas Office** 831-755-4508
  - **Address:** 1270 Natividad Rd, Salinas, CA, 93906
  - **Phone:** 831 – 755 - 4508

## Reopening Your Food Facility

Prior to resuming food preparation and re-opening your facility to the public, the following conditions must be verified:

- All unsafe, potentially hazardous food has been discarded.
- Electricity and gas services have been restored.
- All circuit breakers have been properly reset as needed.
- Any “Boil Water Notices” are followed to assure the water is safe for food preparation and consumption.
- All Equipment and facilities are operating properly, including:
  - Lighting
  - Refrigeration (unit(s) can hold foods at 41° F or below)
  - Freezers (unit(s) can hold foods in a solid, frozen state)
  - Hot holding (unit(s) can hold food at 135° F or above)
  - Ventilation
  - Toilet facilities
- Hot and cold potable water, under pressure for:
  - Hand washing (handwashing station can hold temperatures between 100-108° F)
  - Proper dishwashing (station can hold a minimum temperature of 120° F)
- Voluntary closure of your facility does not require an Environmental Health Specialist for reopening. However, if your facility was closed by the Environmental Health Department, it must remain closed until you obtain approval from the Environmental Health Department to reopen.