

Power Outages and Freezer Safety
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It is the beginning of storm season and one thing that goes hand in hand with the bad weather is power failure. There are several things that can be done in the event of a power failure to reduce food loss. Use backup power, keep the doors closed, try dry ice and cover the freezer to keep it cool.

If the power fails, certain precautions can be taken to assure the safety of frozen food. If the freezer can be turned back on within two days, keep the door closed to avoid loss of refrigeration. The freezer can be covered with a heavy blanket. Safety pins can be used to hold the blanket away from the vents in case the electricity is restored.

If power will not be restored within 48 hours, 2½ pounds of dry ice per cubic foot of capacity can be used. Use gloves to place the dry ice on boards or heavy cardboard on top of the food. This can keep the temperature inside the freezer below freezing for two to three days in a half full freezer, three to four days in a loaded freezer.

If all else fails and there is a heat source and canning equipment, preserving the food according to proper canning methods may be the best option.

One method to tell if the freezer is cold enough is to use an empty plastic soda bottle. Fill the bottle half full of water and put it in the freezer, on its side. Once the bottle has frozen solid, turn the bottle upright and place it in the door. The door is the warmest part of the freezer. If the power goes out while the family is away, the water will melt and gravity will cause it to settle in the bottom of the bottle. Once the electricity is restored, the water will refreeze in an upright position. This creates a visual cue that the power was interrupted for an extended time.

Food safety should be the number one concern. Discard food that has been above 40° Fahrenheit for more than 2 hours, or been contaminated by raw meat juices. Thawed and refrozen ice cream or other dairy products should be discarded.

Other partially thawed food can be refrozen if it has not been warmed above 40° Fahrenheit. If the thawed food still has ice crystals, it is cold enough to refreeze. See the website www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/Focus_On_Freezing/index.asp for more information.

For questions about safe home food preservation, or to schedule a speaker for organizations or clubs on the topics of food safety or food preservation, call the Master Food Preservers at (530) 621-5506. For more information, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/. Sign up to receive our Master Food Preservers E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>.