

# Salvaging Food After a Fire

## WHAT'S SAFE WHEN THE WORST IS OVER

**Use extreme caution when trying to save food after a fire. Food and utensils damaged by heat, smoke, chemicals or water may not be safe to use. Food in cans or jars may appear to be okay. But if it has been close to the heat of the fire, it may no longer be edible. Heat from the fire can activate food spoilage bacteria or cause undesirable flavor changes.**

**Toxic fumes can contaminate food items as well. Items stored in permeable packaging should be thrown away. If you detect an off-flavor or smell in refrigerated foods, dispose of them as well. Your family's health is not worth the risk.**

## WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT

Be thorough in inspecting kitchen items for water, smoke, chemical and heat damage. When in doubt, throw it out.

- ◆ Throw out any of these items if they have come in contact with waters or chemicals used in fire fighting:
  - a) Fresh produce, meat, poultry, fish and eggs.
  - b) Opened containers and packages.
  - c) Containers with peel-off tops, or cork-lined, waxed cardboard or paraffin (waxed) seals.
  - d) All food in cardboard boxes, paper, foil, plastic, cellophane or cloth.
  - e) Spices, seasonings and extracts, flour, sugar and other staples in canisters.
- ◆ Throw away any items that were charred or near the fire. Heat damage may not be apparent on the outside of canned goods, but extreme heat can harm the contents. Throw them away.
- ◆ Throw away any raw foods stored outside the refrigerator like potatoes or fruit, which could be contaminated by fumes or chemicals.
- ◆ Disinfect cans that have no heat damage and are free from dents and rust. Mark contents with an indelible pen, then remove the label. Clean with detergent and scrub brush. Immerse for 10 minutes in a warm solution of chlorine bleach and water — 2 tablespoons of bleach per gallon of water.

## REFRIGERATION AND FREEZER CONCERNS

Refrigerator and freezer seals may not be air-tight. If food has an off-smell or flavor when it is prepared, throw it out.

If the electricity is out to the refrigerator or freezer, follow these guidelines:

- ◆ Discard refrigerated meats, seafood, milk, soft cheese, eggs, prepared foods and cookie doughs if they have been kept above 40 degrees F. for over two hours. Also discard thawed items that have warmed above 40 degrees F., with the exception of breads and plain cakes.
- ◆ Discard any refrigerated items that turn moldy or have an unusual odor or appearance.

- ◆ Refreeze partially or completely frozen foods.
- ◆ Cold but fully thawed, uncooked meat, fish or poultry should be checked for off-odor. If there is none, cook and eat or cook and refreeze.
- ◆ Discard combination dishes such as stews, casseroles and meat pies if they are thawed.
- ◆ Refreeze thawed (but cold) juices, baked goods, and dairy items such as cream, cheese and butter.
- ◆ Do not refreeze thawed vegetables unless ice crystals remain. Cook and use them if there are no off-odors.

**Additional resources:**

Your county family living agent, the American Red Cross, the Federal Emergency Management Agency

**Related publications:**

UW-Extension Publications–

“When the Home Freezer Stops,” (B2837);

“Quick Consumer Guide to Safe Food Handling,” (BG248);

“Keeping Food Safe,” (B3474).

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