

Salvaging Food After a Tornado

FOOD SAFETY IN THE EYE OF A DISASTER

Damaged food supplies, water contamination and temporary loss of refrigeration may be critical issues for you as a tornado survivor. While structural damage may be the initial focus in your home, some basic precautions can keep your food stores safe and your family healthy as you begin clean-up efforts.

If you live in an area susceptible to tornadoes, keep an adequate supply of food, bottled water and emergency equipment on hand. This includes enough canned food to last four to five days, a hand can opener, battery-powered radio, extra batteries and emergency cooking equipment like a camp stove with fuel to operate it.

Additional resources:

Your county family living agent, your local emergency government office, the American Red Cross, the Federal Emergency Management Agency

Related publications:

UW-Extension Publications—

“Management of Food for Emergencies,” (B3045);

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

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

“Keeping Food Safely,” (B3474).

USE CAUTION WITH WATER AND FOOD SUPPLIES

The water supply may be disrupted or contaminated after an area has sustained a tornado. Food in damaged buildings and homes may be hazardous. Follow these precautions:

- ◆ Drink only approved or chlorinated water.
- ◆ Consider all water from wells, cisterns and other delivery systems in the disaster area unsafe until tested.
- ◆ Check foods and discard any containing particles of glass or slivers of other debris.
- ◆ Discard canned foods with broken seams.

REFRIGERATION AND FREEZER CONCERNS

If the electricity is off 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.