Howard County
Health Department

Food Safety Tips: After a Storm or Power Outage

Food spoilage can be an issue when the power goes off. In order to decrease the chances of illness, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Office of Food Control makes the following recommendations for residents who have lost power or experienced flooding.

- Perishable foods without refrigeration (and from the freezer) that have a temperature of 40 degrees Fahrenheit and above for two hours should be discarded. This includes meats, milk, yogurt, eggs, mayonnaise and cream dressings, pastas and deserts.

- Food items that can be kept for a ***limited time*** without refrigeration include: hard processed cheeses (cheddar, Swiss, provolone, Romano and Parmesan); butter and margarine; opened canned fruits and fruit juices; peanut butter, jellies and jams; mustard and vinegar-based dressings; bread products like rolls, muffins, bagels and waffles; and herbs, spices and raw vegetables.

- It is okay to refreeze foods ***if*** the item still contains ice crystals and feels cold and hard to the touch. This includes meats, seafood products, juices, casseroles, egg products, cheeses, vegetables, pastries and frozen meals.

- Discard all foods that come in contact with floodwaters **including canned goods.** Thoroughly wash all kitchen utensils, pots, plates, etc., after contact with floodwater with hot soapy water. Sanitize them by boiling in clean water or immersing them in a solution of 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach per quart of water for 15 minutes.

- When discarding spoiled foods, place them in double plastic bags closed with ties. Put them in animal- and bird-proof trash cans.

- As a rule, an unopened, well functioning freezer half full will keep foods safely for up to 24 hours. A fully stocked, unopened freezer can keep foods safely for 48 hours.

- Use common sense when dealing with the issue of possible food spoilage. **Do not taste foods to see if they are spoiled. If in doubt, <u>throw it out.</u>**