

CONSUMER INFORMATION FROM USDA

Food Safety and Inspection Service, *Food Safety & Consumer Education Office*

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Tornado Food Safety

A tornado is a violently rotating column of air that usually develops from strong thunderstorms. Winds may reach 300 miles per hour in a violent tornado.

Because tornadoes can rip out power and gas lines, and damage buildings, food may be endangered.

First, advice from the National Weather Service can help you "weather" the storm. Then follows USDA's advice for food safety.

Weather the Storm

- When a tornado warning is issued, persons in its expected path should take shelter immediately in a sturdy building, ditch or ravine.
- Opening a window -- once thought to minimize damage -- is not recommended. In fact, opening the window can actually increase damage.
- Do not attempt to flee from a tornado by car. Most deaths occur when people try escaping in vehicles.
- After a tornado, stay out of damaged buildings until you are sure they won't collapse.
- Be alert for gas line leaks. If you smell gas, do not try to cook. Open all windows and doors, turn off the main gas valve at the meter, and leave the house immediately.

Food in a Tornado

In an area sustaining tornado damage, the water supply may be disrupted or contaminated. Food in damaged buildings may be hazardous.

- Drink only approved or chlorinated water.
- Consider all water from well, 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.

If the Power's Out

As during other types of disasters, electricity to the refrigerator and freezer may be off. Use the following "Power Out" chart to decide which foods are safe to use or refreeze when power is restored.

Call Toll-free For More Information

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline
1 (800) 535-4555
Washington DC (202) 720-3333

Also call American Red Cross, Civil Defense or emergency management offices for additional information.

Power Out Chart

Keep an appliance thermometer in the refrigerator (40° F) and freezer (0° F) at all times to see if food is being stored at a safe temperature.

DISCARD the following foods if kept over 2 hours at above 40° F:

- Meat, poultry, fish, eggs and egg substitutes -- raw or cooked
 - Milk, cream, yogurt and soft cheese
 - Casseroles, stews or soups
 - Lunch meats and hot dogs
 - Creamy-based salad dressings
 - Custard, chiffon or cheese pies
 - Cream-filled pastries
 - Refrigerator and cookie doughs
 - Discard opened mayonnaise, tartar sauce and horseradish if above 50° F for over 8 hours
- SAVE. The following foods should keep at room temperature a few days. Still, discard anything that turns moldy or has an unusual odor.**

- Butter or margarine
- Hard and processed cheese
- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Dried fruits and coconut
- Opened jars of vinegar-based salad dressings, jelly, relish, taco sauce, barbecue sauce, mustard, ketchup, olives and peanut butter.
- Fruit juices
- Fresh herbs and spices
- Fruit pies, bread, rolls and muffins
- Cakes except cream-cheese frosted or cream filled
- Flour and nuts

Refreeze thawed foods that still contain ice crystals or feel cold.