



Extended Power Outages

Frequently Asked Questions for Food Service Establishments*

General

WHAT IS AN EXTENDED POWER OUTAGE?

An extended power outage is defined as a lack of power for four or more hours.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CONCERN FOR FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS WHEN THE POWER GOES OUT?

The biggest concern is food requiring **T**ime and **T**emperature **C**ontrol for **S**afety, commonly called TCS food. At improper temperatures, TCS food could become unsafe and lead to **foodborne illness**.

WHAT SHOULD THE FOOD ESTABLISHMENT DO FIRST?

Discontinue food preparation, food handling, warewashing, and cleaning operations.

DOES THE HOUSTON HEALTH DEPARTMENT NEED TO BE NOTIFIED?

Yes. Notify the Houston Health Department Bureau of Consumer Health Services (BCHS) at chs@houstontx.gov, or www.houstonconsumer.org of the imminent health hazard (loss of power).

WHAT DOES AN ESTABLISHMENT NEED TO DO WHEN THE POWER COMES BACK ON?

Reset circuit breakers, evaluate all TCS food for safety, and confirm that equipment is clean, sanitized, and working properly.

* Establishments with an Emergency Preparedness Plan accepted by the Houston Health Department Bureau of Consumer Health Services (BCHS) should follow their plan for recovering from an extended power outage.

TCS Food

WHAT TCS FOOD MUST BE DISCARDED?

Use time and temperature logs and a calibrated thermometer to determine actions to be taken:

Cold TCS Food

- Discard refrigerated food if the temperature exceeded 41°F for more than four hours
- Discard frozen food that thawed and exceeded 41°F for more than four hours.
- Discard any refrigerated or frozen food that has deteriorated in quality or has an unusual color, appearance, or odor.
- Refrigerate previously frozen food that has not exceeded 41°F for more than four hours or cook immediately.
- Cool foods within one hour to ≤41°F if the temperature exceeded 41°F for less than four hours or cook immediately.

Hot TCS Food

- Discard foods that were in the process of being cooked.
- Discard foods if held at ≤135°F for more than four hours.

When in doubt, throw it out! Temperature-abused food may cause foodborne illness.

Cleaning Up and Proper Disposal of Contaminated Food

CAN CLEANING BE CONDUCTED BEFORE POWER IS RESTORED?

No. Hot water is needed to properly clean and sanitize food contact surfaces and equipment. Electricity is needed to heat water (if using electric water heaters) and to provide sufficient lighting for cleaning.

WHAT EQUIPMENT NEEDS TO BE CLEANED?

All food equipment and utensils as needed including ice bins where ice melted during the outage and refrigerators/freezers that contained spoiled food.

WHAT RECORDS ARE NEEDED FOR THE DISPOSAL OF TEMPERATURE-ABUSED FOOD?

Record the type and pounds of food discarded and the method of disposal. Keep the records for health inspection and insurance purposes.

HOW IS CONTAMINATED FOOD PROPERLY DISPOSED OF?

Denature small amounts of temperature-abused TCS food with a cleaning product such as bleach or detergent and place it in a covered waste receptacle. Arrange for transportation of large amounts of temperature-abused TCS food to a landfill by segregating temperature-abused TCS food from all other food and food-contact equipment and labeling it unsafe for consumption until arrangements can be made to remove the food. Refer to the [Proper Disposal of Contaminated Food](#).

Equipment

WHAT EQUIPMENT MUST BE CHECKED BEFORE BEING PUT BACK INTO SERVICE?

- All refrigeration equipment must consistently maintain cold-holding temperatures of $\leq 41^{\circ}\text{F}$ or must be in a frozen state before food is placed in the units.
- Cooking equipment must heat to 165°F for raw animal foods.
- Hot-holding units must maintain $\geq 135^{\circ}\text{F}$.
- Ventilation for cooking equipment must be operating properly.
- Water and booster heaters must be heating adequately for manual warewashing (110°F) and mechanical warewashing with a hot water sanitizing rinse (180°F).

Resuming Operations

HOW DOES AN ESTABLISHMENT RECEIVE APPROVAL TO RESUME FOOD OPERATIONS?

An establishment must meet the [Requirements to Resume Normal Operations](#) before requesting approval to resume normal operations.

Contact BCHS at www.houstonconsumer.org or chs@houstontx.gov.

THE BUREAU OF CONSUMER HEALTH SERVICES MUST GRANT APPROVAL FOR YOUR ESTABLISHMENT TO RESUME FOOD OPERATIONS.

Please contact the Bureau of Consumer Health Services (BCHS) with any questions or concerns.

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HOUSTON HEALTH DEPARTMENT
8000 North Stadium Drive, Houston TX 77054
832-393-5100
CHS@houstontx.gov
HOUSTONCONSUMER.ORG

