

During a power outage, fridges and freezers cannot maintain a safe temperature indefinitely. For the safety of you and your family, food in your home will need to be assessed.

Assess your food items

Food safety may be compromised if items in cupboards were exposed to smoke or water, or if your refrigerator, cooler, or freezer rose above 4°C **at any time**. Please note that the temperature may have exceeded 4°C when the power was disrupted and then cooled again when power was restored.

If possible, determine how long your power outage lasted:

- A full chest freezer will keep food frozen for *up to 2 days*.
- A half-chest freezer will keep food frozen for *1 day*.
- A cooler or fridge will keep food cold for *4 hours*.

Discard spoiled or unsafe foods, including:

- Any food that has spoiled, even if your appliance remained at 4°C at all times.
- Any frozen foods that have thawed, or that have thawed and re-frozen
- Fire-, smoke-, or water-damaged foods like dry goods (i.e., flour, sugar, spices, etc.) even if the package isn't open.
- Unrefrigerated raw vegetables or fruits.
- Foods that were stored in porous containers (e.g., cardboard, paper bags, foam containers, etc.).
- Any canned food item if the can is bulging, rusted or dented.
- Jarred foods, including home canned items, as the heat from the fire may have compromised the safety seal.

If you do not have a thermometer, look for the following signs of spoilage and souring:

- Milk and other dairy products that have spoiled or become sour.
- Ice cream that has thawed and refrozen.

**WHEN IN
DOUBT,
THROW IT OUT**

- Fish products that smell bad upon thawing.
- Food in the freezer that has (or may have) reached 4°C or warmer.

Clean and restock your appliance

If your fridge or freezer is still in good working order, take the following steps to clean it before use:

- Remove everything from the fridge or freezer.
- Use paper towels or rags to wipe up spills and leaks and dispose of them with the food waste.
- Wash out the appliance with warm, soapy water.
- Disinfect the fridge or freezer with a strong bleach solution (1 tsp household bleach per 4 cups water).
- Use latex or rubber gloves if you have sensitive skin that may be irritated by the bleach solution.
- To remove odors, wipe out the appliance with a mixture of water and baking soda, or keep a box of baking soda in the appliance. You also may want to air out the appliance for a few days before plugging it in. Secure doors in an open position to provide air flow and keep children away.
- Wait until the fridge has returned to 4°C (or the freezer has returned to -18°C) before restocking with food.

Damage or losses

If your refrigerator or freezer has been damaged or is not working, consider contacting your insurance company about coverage and contacting your local government for instructions on its safe disposal.

Adapted from: Interior Health 2024. Returning To Your Home After Wildfires.