
Food Incidents: Long Power Outage Cold/Frozen Storage Unit Breakdown

Assess the damage to the food

1. Determine the time when power was cut to the refrigeration or freezer and for how long.
2. Determine if the refrigeration or freezer was working correctly prior to the power cut. Check Food Safety Records and temperature logs.
3. Ascertain as to whether the refrigeration has been opened and shut as this can reduce the internal temperature of the food product.
4. Test the temperature of the foods inside the facility and keep a record. It should be noted that with frozen food, items at the top of a freezer are likely to be greater affected than items at the bottom of a freezer. This is particularly applicable to chest freezers. For this reason each item of food will need to be separately assessed.
5. Categorise the food into safe and potentially unsafe.

Frozen Items

- If the food business operator intends to use some of the partially defrosted foods rather than disposing of all the foods, it will be necessary to separate foods out into the categories below. Ensure the items in each category are clearly identified and listed to avoid confusion. Stickers or labels should be used.

Foods that can be re-frozen

- As a general rule foods which have not defrosted to above **-3°C** and which still contain ice crystals may be re-frozen and given a short shelf life. This may reduce the quality of some foods (on a case by case basis) hence the Food Premises Proprietor should seek advice from the Environmental Health Officer at the Council.

Foods for disposal

- All frozen foods no longer complying with chilled food requirements i.e. those **over 5°C**, should be regarded as unfit and disposed of.

Refrigerated items

- If the food business operator intends to use some of the refrigerated food items rather than disposing of all the foods, it will be necessary to separate foods out into the categories below. Ensure the items in each category are clearly identified and listed to avoid confusion. Stickers or labels should be used.

Foods that can for kept for sale

- If the temperature of the refrigeration unit and the food items in the refrigeration unit have been maintained and continue to be maintained at or **below 5°C**, the items should be considered as not being affected by the breakdown.

Foods which can be used within 4 hours

- If the temperature of the unit cannot be maintained and the food items become exposed to the '**Temperature Danger Zone**' (**between 5 – 60 °C**), the food is to be given a shelf life of **4 hours** and then disposed of.

Foods for disposal

- Assessment as to the safety of food that may have been temperature abused following a long power outage (more than 12 hours) must be undertaken. If unable to assuredly state the food is safe then it should be disposed of.

Disposal of Unsafe foods

The Following Unfit food which requires disposal:

- Foods which have defrosted **above - 3° C** and which cannot be cooked or used immediately should be identified and determined unfit. These foods should be separated out into a suitable waste container and disposed of.
- Foods which have been exposed to the Temperature Danger Zone for **more than 4 hours** should be separated into a suitable waste container and disposed of.
- It may be appropriate to seal any food products with **Authorized Officer tamper proof tape to prevent them re-entering the food chain**. If possible list all unfit food items and agree disposal arrangements between the food business operator and the Environmental Health Officer. Voluntary surrender or suitable alternative arrangements may be agreed.