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Feb. 8, 2010

Virginians Reminded of Food Safety in Aftermath of Winter Storm

RICHMOND, VA – Thousands of Virginians have experienced power outages as a result of heavy ice and snowfall this past weekend. Residents who have lost power are urged to take careful precautions to ensure food safety. The risk of food poisoning is heightened when refrigerators and ovens are inoperable.

“People should discard any food that has been at room temperature for two hours or more, and any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture,” said Michael Cline, state coordinator for the Virginia Department of Emergency Management. “Just remember, when in doubt, throw it out.”

After the loss of power, people can practice safe food handling and prevent food-borne illness by following simple steps:

- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature.
- The refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) and the door remains closed.
- Discard refrigerated perishable food such as meat, poultry, fish, soft cheeses, milk, eggs, leftovers and deli items after 4 hours without power.
- Food may be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is at 40°F or below when checked with a food thermometer.
- Never taste a food to determine its safety.
- Obtain dry or block ice to keep your refrigerator and freezer as cold as possible if the power is going to be out for a prolonged period of time. Fifty pounds of dry ice should hold an 18-cubic-foot full freezer for 2 days.
- If the power has been out for several days, check the temperature of the freezer with an appliance thermometer. If the appliance thermometer reads 40°F or below, the food is safe to refreeze.
- If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine its safety. If the food still contains ice crystals, the food is safe.
- Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with flood water. Discard wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers.

- Thoroughly wash all metal pans, ceramic dishes and utensils that came in contact with flood water with hot soapy water and sanitize by boiling them in clean water or by immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water.
- Undamaged, commercially prepared foods in all-metal cans and retort pouches (for example, flexible, shelf-stable juice or seafood pouches) can be saved. Follow the [*Steps to Salvage All-Metal Cans and Retort Pouches*](#) in the publication "Keeping Food Safe During an Emergency" at:
www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Keeping_Food_Safe_During_an_Emergency/index.asp
- People who have experienced an outage of water service should contact their water provider immediately. For more information on drinking water safely during weather emergencies, access the FSIS publication "Keeping Food Safe During an Emergency" at:
www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Keeping_Food_Safe_During_an_Emergency/index.asp
- **When in doubt, throw it out.**

For additional food safety information, call the toll-free USDA/FSIS Meat and Poultry Hotline at (888) 674-6854. Food safety specialists (both English and Spanish speaking) are available from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. EDT on weekdays year-round.

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