Identifying and Handling Spoiled/Unsafe Food After a Disaster

Whether caused by a loss of power or floods, food spoilage during storms and other disasters is common. In the event of power loss or flood, it is important to check each food item to determine whether or not it is safe to eat. **Do not taste any food you think is spoiled or unsafe to eat!**

The foods and drinks listed below are unsafe to eat and should be thrown away:

- foods and drinks that have been in contact with floodwater (even canned foods);
- meat, poultry, fish, seafood, eggs, milk, soft cheeses, refrigerator rolls and biscuits, leftovers and other potentially hazardous foods that have been above 40 degrees F for 2 hours or longer;
- any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture;
- any canned food that is bulging, opened, dented or damaged;
- all home-canned foods or drinks that have been in contact with floodwater; and
- foods or drinks in containers with screw-caps, snap-lids, crimped caps (like soft drink bottles), twist caps, or flip tops that have come in contact with floodwater.

**How to dispose of unsafe food:**

**If your garbage collection service is in operation:**
Wrap the unsafe food tightly in plastic wrap or aluminum foil and place it in a container with a tight-fitting lid. Store the container in an area away from people and animals until it can be collected by local garbage collection services.

**If your garbage collection service is not in operation:**
Unsafe/spoiled food should be buried. To prevent animals from finding and digging up spoiled food, bury it at least 4 feet deep. To minimize health risks, bury unsafe food in an area that will not be disturbed in the near future and is away from the nearest water well or other open water source (creek, stream or pond).

If it is not possible to bury the food, it may be burned. Contact local law enforcement officials to make sure county burning laws are being followed.

**References:**


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