

# FOOD SAFETY AFTER A FIRE:

## WHEN YOU RETURN HOME

Food exposed during a fire can be compromised by three factors: **the heat of the fire, smoke fumes, and chemicals used to fight the fire.** Also, the power may have been off for a long time. Follow the recommendations below in deciding which foods should be thrown out.

**When in doubt throw it out!**

### Heat from the Fire

Food in cans or jars may appear to be okay, but if they've been close to the heat from of a fire, they may no longer be edible. Why? Heat from a fire can activate food spoilage bacteria. If the heat is extreme, the cans or jars themselves can split or rupture, making the food unsafe.

### Fumes from a Fire

One of the most dangerous elements of a fire is sometimes not the fire itself, but toxic fumes released from burning materials. The fumes can contaminate food, even if it is in the refrigerator. Why? The refrigerator seal isn't airtight and fumes can get inside. Throw out any raw food that has been stored inside or outside the refrigerator such as potatoes or fruit. Discard any type of food stored in permeable packaging - cardboard, plastic wrap, screw-topped jars and bottles, etc. - that has been stored inside or outside the refrigerator. The fumes can penetrate the packaging, making the food unsafe to eat.

### Chemicals Used to Fight Fires

Chemicals used to fight fires contain toxic materials and can contaminate food and cookware. The chemicals cannot be washed off the food. Foods that are exposed to chemicals should be thrown away. This includes food stored at room temperature, such as fruits and vegetables, as well as foods stored in permeable containers like cardboard and screw-topped jars and bottles.

Cookware exposed to fire-fighting chemicals can be decontaminated by washing in soap and hot water. Then submerge for 15 minutes in a solution of 1 tablespoon unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water.

### When the power goes out:

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed.
- The refrigerator will keep food safe for up to 4 hours.
- A full freezer will hold the temperature for about 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full).

### When the power comes back on:

#### REFRIGERATED FOODS

- Never taste food to determine its safety. **When In Doubt, Throw It Out!**
- Discard any food items in the refrigerator if you have been without power for more than 4 hours.
- Discard any foods like bread or salad greens that may have become contaminated by juices dripping from raw meat, poultry, or fish.
- In general, if any food has an unusual odor, color, or texture, throw it out.

#### FROZEN FOODS

- Frozen foods that have thawed, but still contain ice crystals are safe to refreeze.
- Foods that have remained at refrigerator temperatures (41 °F or below) may be safely refrozen; however, their quality may suffer.



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