



FOOD SAFETY & SANITATION

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# The Everclean Report

## Food Safety During Winter Weather

### Special Interest Articles:

- Food Safety During Winter Weather
- What foods *can* be safely held at room temperature?
- Focused Training - Unclean Ice Bins

Severe winter weather can threaten your personal safety and the safety of your property. Power outages caused by heavy snow, freezing rain, ice, and windy conditions occasionally cause major problems in food service facilities.

The following recommendations should be considered during an extended power outage of 2 hours or more.

- Note the time the power outage begins.
- Discard food products that are in the process of being cooked but have not yet reach the final cooking temperature.
- Do not place hot food in refrigerators/freezers. This will rapidly raise the temperature inside the unit and put other foods in the danger zone.
- Maintain hot potentially hazardous food (PHF) at 140°F or above. Food that has reached its final cooking temperature may be kept hot by use of canned heat in chafing dishes.
- Use ice or ice baths to rapidly cool small batches of hot food.

### Refrigerators & Freezers

- Leave the door closed; every time you open it, needed cold air escapes, causing the foods inside to reach unsafe temperatures.
- It is estimated that an unopened refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours.
- It is estimated that a full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) if the door remains closed.
- Discard any PHF that has been in the danger zone (42-139°F) for four hours or more, or has an unusual color, odor, or texture.
- Add bags of ice to refrigerators & freezers if it appears the power will be off for an extended time. To prevent dripping onto foods - place the ice bags into secondary containers.
- You can safely re-freeze thawed foods that still contain ice crystals & are 41°F or less.

*When in doubt, throw it out!*

## What foods *can* be safely held at room temperature?

Why is it that when your auditor arrives, he/she goes with thermometer in hand for the chicken on your cook's line, but never temps the plate of cooked bacon sitting next to the grill since opening? Many products *can* be safely held at room temperature. Why? There are several factors that determine if a product is a potentially hazardous food (PHF) but two variables that act as barriers to bacterial growth are pH level and 'water activity' (Aw) level. Science has shown that microorganisms that make people ill from food don't survive in certain pH or Aw environments. If they don't survive, they cannot grow to dangerous levels.

A pH level < 4.6 usually means a product can be safely held without refrigeration. Common foods (and their pH) that can be held at room temperature are: Vinegar (2.2); Lemons (2.2); Soda/Cola (2.3); Commercial Mayonnaise (3.0); Dill Pickles (3.2)

A water activity level < .86 is usually considered safe for room temperature storage. Common foods (and their Aw) that can be held without refrigeration are: Cookies / Crackers (.30); Dried Fruits and Honey (.60); Cooked Bacon (.64-.76)

## Focused Training: Unclean Ice Bins

1 out of 3 violations for unclean food contact surfaces in January were for unclean ice bins. Dirty ice was linked to an outbreak of Norovirus in Arizona in 2005 and ice tested in fast food restaurants in Florida tested positive for E. Coli in 2006. To keep the ice you serve safe, keep the following points in mind.

- Ice is food and ice bins are food contact surfaces. Even under refrigeration, food contact surfaces need to be washed, rinsed, sanitized, and air dried every 24 hours or less.
- Use only a clean ice scoop to obtain ice, *never* use your hands.
- Inspect ice bins regularly to ensure they are in good, cleanable condition.
- Keep ice bins covered when not in use.

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