Food Safety and Natural Disasters

We practice basic safe food handling daily however it can be very challenging during times when were without power due to natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods or during power outages. Is it possible to keep food safe during a loss of power? Yes, it is and knowing how to keep your food safe could minimize the potential loss of food and reduce the risk of food-borne illness according to USDA.

Here are some tips to follow when preparing for a Weather Emergency:

Make sure freezer is at 40 F or below and refrigerator is at 40 F or below.

Freeze containers of water for ice when for coolers, refrigerators or freezers if the power is out.

Freeze leftover’s, milk, and fresh meat and poultry that you may not need right away.

Store food on shelves to avoid being contaminated if a flood occurs.

Group food together in the freezer, this helps the food stay cold longer.

During and after a Weather Emergency:

Never taste a food to determine its safety!

Keep your refrigerator & freezer doors closed as much as possible.

Your refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours when unopened and a full freezer for 48hr’s, half full freezer closed for 24 hrs.

If the food contains ice crystals or is at 40 F below, it may be safely refrozen.

Block ice or dry ice can keep your refrigerator and freezer as cold as possible for up to 2 days if correct pounds are used.

Discard refrigerated perishable food such as meat, poultry, fish, soft cheeses, milk, eggs, leftovers and deli items after 4 hours without power.

Remember to plan ahead and when in doubt, throw it out!

Did you know you can ask questions regarding food safety to the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline @ 1-888-674-6854; TTY, 1-800-256-7072? This hotline is available in English and Spanish from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern Time Monday through Friday.

Information provided by: www.Fsis.usda.gov

Virginia Cooperative Extension can provide up-to-date, research based information regarding food safety. Visit their website, http://www.ext.vt.edu/ or call your local office for more information. Extension is a joint program of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and state and local governments.