

FOOD SAFETY AFTER A FIRE

Eating food that has been involved in a fire can be dangerous and may cause illness to you and your family. Use extreme caution when trying to save food after a fire. Food exposed to fire can be compromised by three factors:

1. Heat from the Fire:

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

2. 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.

These fumes can kill and can also contaminate food. Any unpackaged food or food stored in permeable packaging (cardboard, plastic wrap, etc.) should be thrown away. Toxic fumes can permeate the packaging and contaminate the food.

Discard any raw foods, stored outside the refrigerator (such as potatoes or fruit) that could be contaminated by fumes.

Food stored in refrigerators or freezers can also become contaminated by fumes. The refrigerator seal is not airtight, and fumes can get inside.

3. Chemicals in 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 those with screw-caps, snap-lids, crimped caps, twist caps, flip tops, and snap-open, and home-canned foods because they cannot be disinfected. Throw away food in cardboard containers, including juice/milk/baby formula boxes.

4. Cookware exposed to chemicals can be decontaminated:

Wash in a strong detergent solution. Then dip in a bleach solution (1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water) for 15 minutes.

5. Power Outage:

Even if your home was not directly damaged by fire, power outages may have occurred. Special considerations are necessary to ensure the safety of food in refrigerators or freezers.

- When the power goes out, keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- Check for signs of power outage such as liquid or refrozen meat juices, soft or melted ice cream.
- If you have returned after being evacuated and are not sure if the power was shut off and then turned back on, check with your utility company.
- Discard any food that has an unusual color, odor, or texture.
- Discard perishable foods (including meat, poultry, fish, eggs and leftovers) in your refrigerator when the power has been off for 4 hours or more.
- Thawed food that contains ice crystals can be refrozen or cooked. Freezers, if left unopened and full during a power outage, will keep food safe for 48 hours (24 hours if half full).

**Reheating food that has become
contaminated will not make it safe!**

**When in doubt,
throw it out!**

Additional Information is available at:

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) - Keep Your Food Safe During Emergencies:
Power Outages, Floods & Fires

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/emergencies/keep-your-food-safe-during-emergencies>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) - Food and Water Safety During Power Outages and Floods
<https://www.fda.gov/Food/RecallsOutbreaksEmergencies/Emergencies/ucm076881.htm>