

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**FOOD PROTECTION AFTER FLOODING OR POWER OUTAGE**

(Charleston, WV) The West Virginia Bureau for Public Health has issued guidelines for the safe handling of food and household items that have been exposed to flood water. Using foods, household products, medicines and cosmetics that have been exposed to flood waters may pose a threat to your health. Such items should be immediately destroyed in a manner approved by your state or local sanitarian. The following may serve as a guide in solving your food supply problems:

All fresh fruits and vegetables exposed to flood water should be destroyed. Fruits and vegetables exposed to flood water in home gardens should not be used. All meats, including fresh, dried, frozen and home canned, should be destroyed, except those in hermetically sealed containers (tin cans) that remain airtight. Foods, such as cereals, bakery goods, dried fruits, flour, frozen foods, sugar, salt, and similar foods in paper or plastic containers or wrapping should be destroyed.

The Bureau for Public Health does not recommend salvaging hermetically sealed containers. At your own risk, you may recondition commercially canned foods using the following methods: Foods in hermetically sealed containers that remain airtight (free from severe dents, split seams or leaks) may be salvaged by removing the labels, washing the containers in water containing a detergent, rinsing in clear water, and submerging in a solution containing laundry bleach. (Two tablespoons of laundry bleach per gallon of water will be sufficient.) This solution should be freshly prepared frequently during the washing process. The containers should be rinsed in cool water from a safe source. Relabel the containers as to contents for future use. Foods, household products, medicines and cosmetics in containers with screw caps or crimped caps should be destroyed. All perishable foods (foods requiring refrigeration) should be destroyed if they have been without refrigeration for four or more hours. Foods that have thawed or partially thawed should be destroyed; however frozen foods that have remained in a closed freezer and have not been exposed to flood water or other contamination may be safe for use provided the time off refrigeration doesn't exceed twenty-four hours.

**WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT.**

**YOUR HEALTH MAY DEPEND ON THE PRECAUTIONS LISTED ABOVE.**

## **For immediate release**

### **Health officials express caution concerning food and power outages**

As a result of the recent severe storms, many West Virginia residents now face the unenviable task of cleaning up and restoring some normalcy to their lives. However, many residents have been hit hard by power outages and that means keeping a close eye on food that is required to be stored in a refrigerator or freezer.

Officials with the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources warn that extended electrical outages can create serious foodborne illness problems with perishable items. The following tips are offered to assist residents in protecting their health:

- Perishable foods requiring refrigeration should be destroyed if their temperature has risen above 41 degrees Fahrenheit for more than four hours.
- Frozen foods in a closed freezer should remain frozen up to 24 hours. After 24 hours, if the food is still partially frozen, it should be safe to refreeze.
- If frozen foods have thawed and have been stored at temperatures above 41 degrees Fahrenheit for less than four hours, they should be safe to use immediately. However, if they have completely thawed and have been stored above the 41 degrees Fahrenheit danger zone for more than four hours, they should be destroyed.

“Right now, we have county sanitarians from around the state set to visit the affected areas to check conditions of perishable foods,” said Joe Wyatt, Acting Director, Public Health Sanitation Division. “These inspectors will follow the same guidelines individuals should use in determining if food is safe for consumption or if it should be disposed of. These retailers are as concerned about the health and safety of their customers as we are and we expect them to be as cooperative as possible in working with us through this trying situation.”

Wyatt says if there is ever any doubt about the safety of the food, the best action is to always discard it as garbage. Foodborne illnesses can be very serious and it's just not worth the risk of eating potentially dangerous foods.

If you have questions about food safety or about foodborne illnesses, call your county health department or call the Office of Environmental Health Services at 304-558-2981 or 1-800-ENV-HEALTH (1-800-368-4358).