

Action In The Event Of Freezer Breakdowns Or Power Failures

If you arrive home to find your freezer has broken down or the power supply to the freezer has been interrupted the following might help you reduce the risk of consuming potentially contaminated food and avoid the risk of food poisoning.

Establish a time frame for the breakdown or power failure. Ask a neighbour or call the electricity company etc to establish when the power went off. If this cannot be established work out when you left and when you returned to find the freezer not working. This is the time frame you should be considering for determining the amount of time a product has been without refrigeration. I.e. you left on your journey at 10am in the morning and returned to find the freezer not working at 7pm on the same day. (This is 9 hours that the food could potentially have been without refrigeration at a controlled temperature). A good chest freezer can keep food frozen in an unheated space for up to 3 days.

Try to separate raw food and ready to eat food such as cakes, ice creams, by placing the raw food at the bottom of the freezer and ready to eat at the top. In chest freezers separate to the right and left if you do not have trays that allow top and bottom separation.

Use a thermometer to check the temperature of food if temperature has not reached -3°C or above or ice crystals are still present in the food, as long as no contamination with other food has occurred then raw food can be re-frozen if the above apply. Remember that the temperature range for freezers and refrigerators goes from minus -18°C to plus $+8^{\circ}\text{C}$ the + sign is usually emitted when writing temperatures down and may not be shown on conventional thermometers.

Ready to eat food that has reached -3°C or has no ice crystals or has been contaminated by raw food thawing must be destroyed. Ready to eat food that is at the above temperature and has not been contaminated can be eaten straight away.

Things you can do:

Keep doors closed until power is restored.

If possible cover freezer with blankets or newspaper's for extra insulation. However, remove these as soon as the power is turned back on. Do not block vents at the back of the appliance.

If you have a freezer thermostat and the temperature goes higher than -3°C or if food has started to defrost and become soft (No ice crystals in food) then take the following action:

- If ready to eat food has not been contaminated with juices from raw food - it can be eaten as if it were fresh food.
- Uncontaminated raw food can be cooked and eaten or frozen after cooking or refrozen. (Refrozen food will have a reduced life in the freezer and its quality will be affected in that it will be of poorer quality than expected).

Contaminated food should always be thrown away.

Useful tips: your freezer should operate at –18C or less.

Your refrigerator should hold food at 8C or less.

You should have a thermometer (Not Glass) to check temperatures are okay and match the digital temperature display if you have one.

Commercial Premises

Safe Disposal And Voluntary Certificates

In the event of a freezer breakdown or power failure it may not be necessary to destroy all the affected stored produce. When frozen food thaws out bacteria in the food will recommence growth. If the majority of the food remains frozen, its outer layers are likely to be at temperatures below 8°C and bacterial growth will be at a relatively slow rate. Such foods should be transferred to a refrigerator or chill room and used within 48 hours or, if refrozen, used as soon as possible. In each case a discretionary judgment has to be made based on the temperature gain, the time period, the type of food and the individual condition of the stored produce. However, if the food has thawed at an unknown temperature it should not be used.

The food authority is responsible for arranging the destruction or safe disposal of the food Borough Council Of Kings Lynn & West Norfolk use voluntary procedures to deal with unsafe food. Where food is voluntarily surrendered for destruction a receipt will be issued and the description of the food should include the phrase "voluntarily surrendered for destruction" and should be signed by the person surrendering the food. Voluntarily surrendered certificates with the description of the foods should be past on to your insurance company so a valid claim can be made. There is a charge for this service so please contact us.