

IDENTIFYING AND HANDLING SPOILED/UNSAFE FOOD AND DRINKS AFTER A DISASTER

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Food and drinks are often spoiled during storms and other disasters. After a power loss or a flood, each item needs to be checked to determine whether it is safe to eat or drink. Do not taste anything that is suspected to be spoiled!

FOODS TO THROW AWAY

- ▶ All food and drinks that have been in contact with floodwater, including home-canned foods.
- ▶ Eggs, soft cheese, leftovers, meat, milk, poultry, seafood, refrigerator rolls and biscuits, and other potentially hazardous foods that have been above 40°F for 2 hours or longer.
- ▶ Food that has an unusual color, odor, or texture.
- ▶ Food or drinks in containers with flip tops, snap lids, screw caps, twist caps, or crimped caps (like those on bottles of soft drinks), and any that have come in contact with floodwater.
- ▶ Cans of food that are bulging, damaged, dented, or opened.

WHAT MIGHT BE SAFE

Foods that were commercially canned or in pouches may be saved (e.g., shelf-stable juice packets or seafood pouches) *if* they are not damaged, *if* access to water that is safe for drinking is available, and *if* the following is properly done:

1. Remove all the labels. They can contain dirt, bacteria, and other harmful materials from floodwaters.
2. To remove any dirt from the cans and pouches, wash them with soap and water that is safe for drinking.
3. Rinse the packages in safe drinking water.
4. To kill germs, place the cans/packages in a sanitizing solution made from 1 tablespoon of unscented bleach and 1 gallon of water.

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5. Let them soak for 15 minutes and then air-dry.

6. Label the cans and packages with a marker. Use these foods first.

If enough safe drinking water is not available, the best thing to do is throw away these foods. Keep that water available for drinking to avoid dehydration.

DISPOSING OF UNSAFE FOOD

If the garbage service is in operation, do the following:

- ▶ Wrap the unsafe food tightly in plastic wrap or aluminum foil. Place it in a container that has a tight-fitting lid.
- ▶ Store the container in an area away from people and animals until the local garbage collection service can collect it.

If the garbage service is not in operation:

- ▶ Bury the unsafe food at least 4 feet deep to prevent animals from digging it up. To help prevent diseases from spreading, bury it in an area that will not be disturbed in the near future and away from the nearest creek, pond, river, or water well.
- ▶ If the food cannot be buried, ask local law enforcement officials if burning it is permissible.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Disposal of Domestic or Exotic Livestock Carcasses, by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. November 2004.

Food Safety for Consumers Returning Home After a Hurricane and/or Flooding, by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. July 2014.

Keep Food and Water Safe after a Natural Disaster or Power Outage, by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. September 2005.