



Season 1 Episode 4—Perishable Prevention

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Terence Martin

(Intro with music) This is Food Defender podcast with Dr. Terence Martin, food safety and quality specialist at Alabama Extension at Alabama A&M University. Our Food Defender podcast covers everything that comes to food safety. For example, USDA guidelines, FDA guidelines, and just general consumer safety as it pertains to food.

Terence Martin

Welcome back to another episode of Food Defenders. I am your host, Dr. Terrence Martin. Food safety specialist here at Alabama Extension at Alabama A&M. This episode we're going to talk around food and water safety during power outages and possible floods. With spring coming in, the weather, is changing rapidly. We need to be prepared. Some of us take for granted that that, you know, we have refrigeration and power and, you know, doing that.

We just getting out of the winter months and we think about the ice storms and the snow that make us lose power. And we run to the store to get bread and milk. When the winter hits. But we got to think about spring spring weather as well, because that's what you get in a lot of, weather change and tornadoes and high winds, possible.

Terence Martin

A lot of rain. Downfall for flooding. So, this episode is just going to touch around some of the tips. In case you do have a power outage. So, a couple of the things that you can possibly do, to be prepared. Prepare yourself now for it. And one of the best thing I always say is be prepared.

Don't wait to the day of. Or the week of. If you are, if, if you prepare, you don't have to. If you're ready, you don't have to get ready when it's time. It does happen. So, prepare yourself before power outages. You know, make sure you have appliances...That you apply thermometer...apply thermometers in your refrigerator.

I will say, recommend that you purchase yourself, thermometer that you put inside the refrigerator. That way you can monitor the temperature even, without a power outage. I always just recommend that you have on your refrigerator and freezer. That way, in case something happened. Fluctuate. You can always look at your temperature to make sure, that it is holding the correct temperature, you know, and check to ensure the freezer temperature is staying well below zero in the refrigerator.

Terence Martin

Right. You know, is set at 40 or below, this is important during a power outage to keep temperature check. But as well as, you know, if there's no power outage, you want to make sure everything's still working properly in your freezer and refrigerator. But in case of a power outage, the, the appliance thermometer will kind of give you indicate, the temperature as a refrigerator and the freezer begin to hit those, areas when food safety is concern.

And there's a give you an idea, you know, food safety zones. If a food store warming up, some other things that you can possibly do. On the food safety, to keep, keep your food cold or, frozen. You know, freezer contains the water of ice to help keep food cold in the freezer, a refrigerator or coolers in case of power goes out.

You know, if you got room, if you have a big freezer sometime its good to have, like those ice packs, extra ice packs, in your freezer for a power outage that can, extend your, your food, for warming up. A lot of times, this this is a good way.

Terence Martin

If you do have a power outage, that way, you can keep your food cold. You know, just normal water supply. You know, we have to think about water as well. Especially the flooding. You may not have adequate, water. So you want to make sure you have, palatable water that you can

consume or use, use, if you need to, do anything with water in case your normal water supply become contaminated.

You know, another thing? Freeze refrigerated, freeze refrigerated items, you know, such as your leftovers. You know, I get a question a lot of times. Can you freeze milk? Yes, you can freeze milk and use it at a later time. It's a good way to, you know, we talking about it, but you could freeze your milk in a freezer and still use it and thaw it out.

You know, that's the way to save money. Say, if a grocery store is having to sell, if you can, you know, you can that's just a little tidbit that you can freeze milk as well. Leftover poultry. And go ahead and freeze it. If you have food leftover, you know, have it frozen and stored. Kind of group foods together in your freezer.

Terence Martin

This helps food stay colder. You know? If you keep your food kind of in the group, in the cold, in the freezer, it kind of keeps it isolated together. Helps keep it cold alot longer I would always recommend also having a couple coolers on hand, to keep refrigerated food cold if the power goes out, you know, especially if it's going to be out more than four hours.

Those ice packs in a cooler will help you keep your refrigerated food cool at least around 40 to below. For a while. Like I said, purchase those ice packs in advance in freezer gel packs ahead of time. You know, store all these in the freezer and for future, in case your to use for your refrigerator and your coolers to keep your food, cool.

So it's all about being prepared for the emergency storm come middle of the spring. Power out tree took down the line or something in your in your neighborhood, but if you're prepared, that's the best way to do it. One of the things that we don't talk about a lot of time is dry ice. You know, you want to be safe with dry ice because it can.

Terence Martin

How you handling it? But, check out local sources to know where dry ice may be. You know, blocks of ice to purchase. Do, so do do your research and be prepared to say, okay, I know, maybe Kroger's carry block, dry ice, you know, but everybody else run into Kroger's to get going to the grocery store to get bread and milk, cause a power outage.

You may want to have a resource. Let me go get this dry ice because I know they may carry it to keep my food frozen and, cold for a power outage. So, foods on the shelf that will be safely out of the way of contaminated water in case of floods. If you living in a flood zone, you know, you're always susceptible to flooding.

You want to keep your food that you may have in your pantry up off the floor, up on shelves. That way it won't become, contaminated with, you know, flood water. That's that's one of the, good habit to put your food up high on some of the shelves in case you do get flooding. You know, one of the things you see, a lot of time we don't talk about during floods and power outages.

Is bottled water. You see it? A lot of time, people bringing in bottled water, to replace because water, you know, due to power outage or floods. You want to make sure, we have adequate amount, supply of bottled water store where it would be safe as possible from the flooding. You know, if your bottled water has an odor, do not drink it or use it.

Terence Martin

You know, some people may have water from 2 or 3 years ago in storage. And, you want to be, you know, water can go bad to, you know, if you got a bad odor, and even the taste. Don't use it. Instead, just dispose of it.

You might call your bottled water provider to make arrangements to to get a replacement. If you get water, because sometimes the companies have water stored supplies. You know, for sale, and sometimes for emergency purposes. If you get in water that you have purchased, you to be prepared and you got a bad odor or something like that, you can always probably reach back out to, that provider, in order to get, you know, to replace, you know, do an emergency if you use food or beverages, containers to hold the non-food substance like gasoline, dispose of them after use, and do not recycle.

Sometimes we use these containers, the for gasoline and other things as not food, beverage containers. So just just be mindful of that as well. So when the power does go out, you got a couple of basic tips for keeping food safe. Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors close as much as possible to maintain the cold.

Terence Martin

A cold temperature, you know, if you have you have kids that love to go in and out, open that fridge. See if anything changed within five minutes. You know the same stuff is in there. So make sure your family and your kids, keep the refrigerator closed as much as possible during a power outage. You know, I just know kids tend to always go into the refrigerator all the time and see what's in there, and 30 minutes later, see what's in there.

So power outage. It's very important that you, keep that refrigerator closed as much as possible. You know, most frigerator will keep cold for about four hours. If is unopened. It'll help maintain that temperature. 40 degrees, at least for hour. So if it's a temporary, power outage, you should be good at least up into four hours before you start seeing the temp.

If you're keeping it closed, before you start seeing the temperature rise in your refrigerator. A full freezer. And, you know, we'll keep the temperature for approximately almost 48 hours. 24 hours is no half. If the doors can't remain closed even with your freezer. That freezer probably will maintain its temperature of freezing, for a good 48 hours.

Terence Martin

If you're not in and out of it. Like I said before, possibly even buy that dry ice. You can, you know, as if you were seeing that possibly you don't exceed that 48 hours with your freezer refrigerator that can help you, maintain, that, that temperature. If you're looking for a prolonged power outage, you know, some places you can get those, blocks of ice dry ice and 50 pound, dry ice in which, you know, which 18 cubic foot.

You know, you could keep a, freezer cold for a couple of days. Absolutely. If you plan to eat refrigerator, frozen meat, poultry such as poultry, fish, eggs while they're still safe temperature, it's important that each item is thoroughly cooked, to a safe and minimum internal temperature. So we're talking about food safety here. Now. So if you don't have power, you may have, a gas grill outside that you have access to.

Terence Martin

If you're going to use a, you know, if you're going to those refrigerated foods like meats and poultry, fish, eggs, make sure the internal temperature is, at the recommended temperature. If it's been set and you know, several hours and notice is warming up, we want to make sure we, that the right temperature for those to kill off those foodborne bacterias that may be present, however, if perishable food has been held at room temperature for more than two hours, Even an hour outdoors above 90, you know, we don't want to waste food, but it's better to discard it and put your health at risk in especially if you have some underlying condition, heart in your eye. Maybe you have heart problems or diabetes or you may be a cancer survivor. Food has been held out and the temperatures haven't got warm. Just disregard that. Don't take that risk. You know? So what happens once the power restored? If it's been out a couple of days, you try to.

Terence Martin

Now you trying to determine what should I do with this food? Is it good? It might not have an odor yet, you know. So we want to determine the safety of your food. You know that the moment as I was talking about earlier, you know, in your appliance, that's your refrigerator freezer, was kept in the freezer. Check the temperature.

When the power comes back on, see where it's at. You know, the freezer thermometer reads 40 degrees or below. The food is safe and maybe still refrozen. That's the importance of having those

thermometer in your appliance is like a refrigerator freezer. When the power comes back on, you can check that temperature and see where it's at if it's still at 40 below.

Terence Martin

Hey, okay, you should be okay to go back in. Food should be still safe to refreeze. You know, if your thumb thermometer has not been kept in a freezer, check each package of the food to determine if it's safe. You can rely on. You can't rely on appearance or odor, but you can look at the ice crystals.

That's one to determine. The food still contains ice crystals or still like, is 40 below. Decide to refreeze or cook even, one of the things you can do if you think is gotten above that 40 degrees in the cold by going out, recommend cooking it, and then refreezing it, as a cook product for future use.

If the power was out for more than four hours, refrigerate. Food should be safe. As long as the doors was kept closed. The power comes back on. Check that thermometer, inspect that food. Discard any refrigerated perishables, such as meat you know, like lunch meat that may have warmed up after it between the four hours. And, you know, milk and eggs left over has at refrigerated if it's above 40 degrees for four hours, fresh food with temperatures that are 45 degrees or below, you know, just remember look at that.

Terence Martin

Thermometer you know, should be safe or, should be cooked and consumed as soon as possible. Know, if you look at any of the flooding, you know, is a lot of areas here in Alabama, maybe in flood zones. You have to be cautious with that and is usually around bottled water, having water, palatable water for access to cook, to clean, once place been, flooded out.

Terence Martin

So you may want to follow these steps to keep your water safe during and after your flood conditions. Only use water from safe sources for drinking and washing and preparing foods. A lot of people during flooding disasters, they bring in, you know, pallets of water, from a good source, usually bottled water that has not been exposed to the flood.

If it's still available, it didn't get washed out. If you don't have bottled water, you should boil and disinfect water to make it safe. Now, there's certain steps once the power comes back on that you can use to, get palatable water when you boil it. And, one of the things we preach around food safety and safety as a whole, you know, boiling kills bacteria, disease causing organisms.

Once you power get back on, boil water, disinfect with bleach. You know, that helps, kill a lot of bacteria and, does it cause an organism that may be in water? To store disinfected water in clean containers? What covers another doing? Flood keep food safe. Follow these tips. Keep your food safe during and after flood conditions.

Terence Martin

Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water because these flood waters come from everywhere. May have, over flooded sewage line. So it's going to carry a lot of bacteria. So you want to make sure you keep your, food from contact with that flood water, this dis- discard any food and beverage that is not in waterproof container.

If there any chance that you think that it has came in contact with food, water, discard it. You know food containers that are waterproof include undamaged commercially prepared foods and all metal cans in retort pouches like flexible shelf stable juices and seafood pouches. Food containers that are not waterproof include those screw caps, snap lead pull tab and crimp caps.

You know, you have to be, leery of those, if they've been in, flood water. So, we recommend discard. Also, if you got juice boxes like milk boxes, in cardboard. Disregard that. If it's been in flood water, they have come in contact with low water, so they cannot be effectively cleaned and sanitized.

Terence Martin

Damaged cans, food. That has been damaged. Those as well in leaking. That looks like it got a hole discard crust due to the flood water. Thoroughly washed metal pans, ceramic dishes, utensils. Those are some tips you have. Is you going through a flood and things have come in contact with flood water? Those waters have so much opportunity for bacteria causing, food borne diseases or is causing diseases as a whole.

Terence Martin

And so as you get back, from the floods, you want to make sure things are clean countertops with soap, water is a hot water. When is available, rinse and then sanitize. Using a solution. At least one tablespoon of unscented household, liquid bleach per gallon of water. Then let the air dry. Well, these are some tips, for flooding.

You want to dispose of any undamaged, and you know it. You know, if you don't have any damage packages, you have, you can kind of inspect those. Just make sure they hadn't became damaging. They probably may be good. Because they tend to handle, you know, bacteria a little bit better.

With that, you know, we want to make sure, especially if you have a baby in the house, you may have formula.

Terence Martin

The formulas now come in a powdered, state. You want to take real precaution with that? If you're in a flood, if you have any doubt and you don't have clean water. Don't don't take the risk of making those, formulas, baby formulas with, you know, possibly contaminated water. You know, as you get back to just any kind of normalcy, with your family, you know, that you think may have consumed foods, may have been contaminated and got some dangerous foodborne bacteria.

Terence Martin

You know, it usually take 1 to 3 days of eating contaminated foods. You may start seeing some kind of sickness. You know, stomach cramps, diarrhea. So keep your, just to make sure if he's a family member, start getting those flu-like symptoms. So, they may have gotten something, that may have gotten contaminated from further water. You know, make sure you take these actions when it comes to food safety around being prepared for a storm.

Terence Martin

Power outage. Flooding. If you prepared, do the best to prepare and take these actions and and hopefully, you would be able to stay healthy once that power's back on or the flooding has subsided and you can try to get back to normalcy. You also look for those resources out there. Check in with your local offices. And sometime our county offices may have, be prepared readiness kits and those type things that that can help you as well as you prepare before power outage or a flood. Stay safe and diligent when it comes to your safety, your family safety, and your loved ones, when it comes to food safety.

Terence Martin

(Outro Music) Once again, this is Dr. Terrence Martin with Food Defenders with Alabama Extension at Alabama A&M. Stay safe and knowledgeable of what's going on around you...everything food.