

# Food Safety After a Fire

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## Food exposed to fire can be compromised by four factors:

- Heat of the fire
- Smoke fumes
- Chemicals used to fight the fire
- Power outage as a result of the fire

### Heat

Food in cans or jars may appear to be fine, but if they have been close to the heat of a fire, they may not be edible. Heat from a fire can activate food spoilage bacteria. If the heat is severe, the cans or jars can split or rupture, resulting in unsafe food.

### Smoke Fumes

Toxic fumes, which may be released from burning materials, are one of the most dangerous elements of a fire. The fumes can be hazardous, and they can also contaminate food.

- Discard any food stored in permeable packaging, such as cardboard or plastic wrap. Toxic fumes can permeate the packaging and contaminate the food.
- Discard any raw foods stored outside the refrigerator, such as potatoes or fruit, as they could also be contaminated by fumes. Even food stored in the refrigerator or freezer can become contaminated by fumes, as the seals are not necessarily airtight.

If food from your refrigerator or freezer has an off-flavor or odor when it is prepared, it should be discarded and not eaten.

### Chemicals Used to Fight Fires

Chemicals used to fight fires contain toxic materials that can contaminate food and cookware. While some of the chemicals may be listed as non-toxic to humans, they can be harmful if swallowed. These chemicals cannot be washed off of the food.

- Discard foods that have been exposed to chemicals, including:
  - Food stored at room temperature, such as fruit and vegetables
  - Food stored in permeable containers, like cardboard and screw-topped jars and bottles

Canned goods and cookware exposed to chemicals can be decontaminated if they have not been subjected to severe heat (see “heat” above).

- Wash canned goods and cookware that have been exposed to chemicals with soap and hot water. Then dip them in a bleach solution (1 teaspoon of bleach per quart of water) for 15 minutes, rinse, and let air dry.

## Power Outage

The main concern with perishables stored in the refrigerator and freezer is the availability of electrical power. Refrigerated items should be safe, provided that the power is off for no more than about two hours. If the power has been off for more two hours:

- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed.
- Open the refrigerator as little as possible.
- Discard any perishable food that has been held at temperatures above 41°F for more than 2 hours.
- Discard any food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture.
- Discard food in your refrigerator and freezer that looks suspicious, such as the presence of liquid or refrozen meat juices, soft or melted and refrozen ice cream, or unusual odors.

[Learn how to clean and sanitize after a flood.](#)

Never taste food to determine its safety. Food unfit for human consumption is also unfit for pets. If in doubt, throw it out.

## Medication

Medication that has been exposed to heat, smoke, soot, or water should not be consumed or applied to skin.