



## **Reopening a food business after a power cut or civil emergency - Important advice to cafes, restaurants and food retailers**

As you get your business up and running again it's vital extra steps are taken to ensure food is safe for your customers.

What you do next will depend on the amount of damage to your premises and equipment, the availability and amount of drinking water supply you need, condition of food in stock and the type of food you want to sell.

The following points and the 'Reopening a Food Business checklist' provide a quick summary of the most important things to consider as a café, restaurant or food retailer reopening for business.

### **1. Are premises structurally sound for preparing or handling food?**

Once the building has formally been declared as safe you will need to make sure any damage to food areas does not stop you from operating hygienically. Is there a chance that food will become contaminated, such as from leaking pipes, sewage, or damaged ceiling or wall claddings falling onto food?

Make sure the services you need for power, water supply and drainage haven't been damaged or weakened in the premises.

### **2. Are toilets and personnel hygiene facilities working?**

Make sure toilets for staff and customers are in working order. If a 'boil water' notice is in effect, staff should wash hands using cooled boiled water, or water treated with bleach/chlorine (5 drops of bleach to one litre of water); then use a hand sanitiser. Have hand wipes and hand sanitisers available for customer hygiene.

### **3. Can the premises be thoroughly cleaned before use?**

Areas used for food preparation and serving will need to be thoroughly cleaned, and food preparation surfaces and utensils sanitised before use to ensure there is no risk to food safety.

### **4. Is the water safe to use?**

If a 'boil water' notice is in effect, it is recommended that you use a supply of bottled drinking water if you need to use water as an ingredient in food while the notice is in place.

Turn off ice machines until the 'boil water' notice has been lifted.

A range of other machines that are plumbed into the area's water supply system will also be affected by the 'boil water' notice and need to be turned off, including slush-ice makers, post mix guns, self-service soft drink machines and some water coolers. Drinking fountains also need to be turned off.

Most coffee machines only heat water to 80 - 85° C, so these machines need to be supplied with pre-boiled water. Plumbed-in machines should not be used.

Remember to only use cooled boiled water, or water treated with bleach/chlorine (5 drops of bleach to one litre of water) to wash hands when preparing food. Use a sanitiser after washing hands, especially if water is scarce.

Identify the best way to boil or chlorinate the water needed and make someone responsible for maintaining the supply.

Using disposable gloves might help, but remember to change them regularly and wash your hands in clean water when you do so.

When the 'boil water' notice has been lifted, run taps to check the water before you use it. If you notice anything unusual with the colour or cloudiness or smell, contact your water supplier for advice. Don't use the water until your supplier has confirmed that it is OK. Further information about water in food businesses can be found at:

[http://www.foodsafety.govt.nz/elibrary/industry/food-control-food-fcp-plans/Water\\_supply.pdf](http://www.foodsafety.govt.nz/elibrary/industry/food-control-food-fcp-plans/Water_supply.pdf)

## 5. Is food still safe to use?

Check how long fridges, chillers and freezers have been without power as food safety may have been affected. As a 'rule of thumb':

- If power to fridges and chillers was off for less than 24 hours, and chillers were not opened during the power cut (or only opened briefly to add bags of ice) contents must be checked but should be OK.
- If power was off for more than 24 hours, or chillers were opened (eg not to add bags of ice) readily perishable food should be discarded.
- In any case, food beyond its 'Use-by' date code must be thrown out.

**Readily perishable foods are those that need to be kept below 4°C. These are foods containing meat, fish, dairy products; plus prepared salads, sandwiches, cooked rice and pasta and processed foods containing eggs, beans, nuts or other protein-rich foods. Any microbes on these foods grow when the temperature of the food increases.**

- Perishable foods in the chiller, for example fruit and hard cheeses, may still be safe to use if they are not showing obvious signs of spoilage.
- If a freezer was full, power was off for less than 4 days and the freezer was not opened during the power cut and there is no evidence of thawing, contents should be OK to use.
- If power was off for more than 4 days, or the freezer was opened during the power cut, or the freezer was not full or there is any evidence that contents have completely thawed, or have thawed then refrozen, then **DO NOT USE THE FOOD** – throw it out. And don't feed it to your pets.
- Partially thawed food in the freezer should be completely defrosted and used immediately.

Food still frozen with ice crystals throughout can continue to be kept frozen if you are sure it did not thaw out and then re-freeze when the power came back on. Frozen food that has defrosted and was refrozen when the power was restored should not be used. This will not always be obvious, but important signs of defrosting and refreezing will be misshapen products, or drip from packaging that has become frozen, or packages stuck together, or the pooling of frozen fluids in the bottom of sealed packages.

**If in doubt, throw it out.**

## 6. Is refrigeration working?

Make sure chillers, freezers, display cabinets and other equipment has not been damaged and will work as intended.

## 7. Food for sale

Particularly while a 'boil water' notice is in place, think about providing food that needs minimum handling or is very thoroughly cooked.

## 8. Sourcing new supplies

If you are restocking from local suppliers ensure perishable or frozen foods were not affected by power outages. Check that your supplier has taken the steps indicated in 5 above.

## 9. Do your staff know what to do?

It is important everyone knows what they must do to produce safe food during an emergency, particularly if there is a disrupted clean water supply. It is vital hands and food preparation surfaces are kept clean. Mark different pots and pans being used to boil or cool water so people know which to use. **If in any doubt about what you should do, contact the Environmental Health Officer at your local council.**

For more information phone 0800 693 721 or go to [www.foodsafety.govt.nz](http://www.foodsafety.govt.nz)