



## Safe Handling of Food and Utensils After a Flood

Flood waters may carry silt, raw sewage, oil or chemical waste that can make storm-damaged foods unsafe to eat. If you have a question about the safety of any item, dispose of it. Otherwise, keep the following points in mind.

**Discard** the following foods if floodwater has covered, dripped on or seeped into the package:

- Fresh produce; meat, poultry, fish and eggs;
- Paper, cloth or fiber;
- Cardboard boxes, even if the contents seem dry, including cereals, pasta products, rice, salt;
- Any "sealed" packages of crackers, cookies or mixes within a larger paper box;
- Foods with cardboard seals, such as mayonnaise and salad dressing, or foil or cellophane packages;
- Food in glass jars, including unopened jars with waxed paper, foil, cellophane or cloth covers;
- Home-canned foods (some tightly sealed home-canned foods may be safe depending on conditions. Contact a food preservation specialist or local health department for advice.);
- Spices, seasonings and extracts;
- Foods, liquids or beverages in crown-capped bottles or containers with pull-tab tops, corks or screw caps;
- All opened containers and packages; foods in bags or canisters;
- Cans that are dented, leaking, bulging or rusted; and
- Cans that have been tossed about and are far from their normal storage spot.

**Destroy** all foods that were covered by water that may have been contaminated with industrial or sanitary waste, including foods sealed in unopened cans.

**Cans of food** that do not have dents or rust can be saved if they are handled properly before they are opened. Be sure to wash and sanitize undamaged containers before opening the can. For added safety, boil food before eating it.

### Disinfecting Food Cans

To disinfect undamaged cans (damaged cans should be discarded):

- Remove paper labels (paper can harbor bacteria) and re-label with a permanent marker.
- Wash the containers in a strong detergent solution.
- Use a brush to remove any dirt and silt.
- Rinse the scrubbed containers. Removing dirt and silt and rinsing is very important because the chlorine solution won't work well if cans are dirty.
- Wear rubber gloves to protect your hands during the disinfection process. Strong detergent and bleach solutions can be hard on bare hands.

- Immerse the clean, rinsed containers in a lukewarm (75 to 120 degrees F) solution of chlorine for two minutes. Use two (2) tablespoons of five percent chlorine bleach per gallon of water. Chlorine loses its effectiveness when it is in a solution and open to the air or when it comes in contact with unclean materials.
- Change this disinfecting solution frequently. Dump it out and mix fresh solution if the water gets cloudy.
- Take cans out and air dry before opening or storing.
- Use foods from disinfected containers as soon as possible because cans may rust.

### **Disinfecting Dishes and Utensils**

- Wash all dishes and utensils in hot, soapy water with a brush to remove dirt.
- Sanitize glass, ceramic and china dishes, glass baby bottles, and empty canning jars in the same way as for undamaged cans.
- Dishes with deep cracks should be thrown away.
- Metal pans and utensils can be disinfected by immersing them in water and boiling for 10 minutes.
- Kitchen utensils made of iron will probably be rusted. Remove the rust by scouring with steel wool.
- Disinfect with a bleach solution and re-season. To do this, apply a light coat of unsalted fat or oil and place in a 350° F oven for about an hour.

### **Disinfecting Food Preparation and Serving Areas**

- All food preparation and serving areas should be cleaned and sanitized prior to use.
- Use a chlorine solution equivalent to 100 ppm (1/2 tablespoon of household bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite solution) in 1 gallon of potable water to sanitize.
- Use chlorine test strips to insure adequate concentration of sanitizing solution.

Determine the approximate weight and value of the merchandise with the help of the owner or manager of the firm.

- Food shall be hauled to a licensed landfill in accordance with state and local transport requirements. The disposal firm may need to obtain prior approval from the state or local food regulatory authorities. This is especially true if the size of the damaged inventory is extensive.
- Follow up on the final dispositions to a point where there is a certainty that the entire lot has been properly disposed of. It may be advisable to visit the landfill site to make sure all food products are being properly disposed of, which may include decharacterizing, bulldozing, and immediate burial.

## **SALVAGE**

### **Dairy Products, Eggs, Butter, Margarine, Cheese, and Milk:**

As a rule, all such dairy products must be destroyed with no attempt at salvage.

### **Sugars, Candies, Flour, Cereal Products, Bakery Products, Dried Beans, Rice, and Other Grains:**

Usually, no attempt to salvage such products can be permitted.

### **Products in Glass with Metal Screw-Type or Metal Slip Covers:**

This includes pickles, olives, catsup, steak sauces, salad dressings, syrups, etc. This type of container is impossible to clean and disinfect and must be destroyed.

### **Fish and Meats — Fresh or Frozen:**

In almost all instances, these products must be destroyed. Canned fish and meat products, e.g., hams, picnics, canned fish, may be salvaged if it can be determined that the heat from the fire has not been extensive. In this case, cleaning and disinfecting the cans is advisable.

### **Frozen Food:**

Usually no salvage can be attempted unless frozen foods are stored in a completely enclosed walk-in or cabinet freezer and electrical service has not been interrupted. Prompt removal of such foods to another suitable location is usually advisable.

### **Produce — Fresh:**

Usually, no attempt at salvage can be permitted and all such products must be destroyed.

### **Jams, Jellies, Peanut Butter, and Baby Foods in Glass:**

Typically, such products must be destroyed because it is nearly impossible to clean and disinfect the jars, especially under the lip of the cover. The food in the glass container will usually become contaminated when the lid is removed by an unsuspecting consumer.

### **Canned Goods:**

- Where the heat and water damage has been minimal, canned goods can be salvaged quickly by cleaning the exterior surfaces and removing them to suitable storage areas, preferably away from the fire scene.
- If the contents of the cans are satisfactory, but the labels are discolored or the canned goods have been subjected to exterior can contamination, e.g. metal discoloration from smoke or water, or contaminated water or chemicals have been used to fight the fire, salvage of the canned foods can be costly.
- Exteriors of the cans must be cleaned and sanitized in an approved manner. With most grocery fires, the individual lots of canned foods are small. Labels will be difficult to replace and effective salvage will be time consuming and costly. In many cases, the insurance underwriter will prefer that the canned goods be destroyed since salvaged foods usually have a much lower value than the first line merchandise.

**Salvaged Goods – Donation:**

It may be possible to divert foods mentioned above to a local food bank for distribution to charitable organizations; check with state guidelines to determine if this is allowed.

**Salvaged Goods—Reconditioning:**

If the quantities of food involved are large; e.g. a large supermarket or a food warehouse, it may be feasible to attempt salvage for either human or animal consumption. They must either be destroyed or moved out of state under seizure to approved firms that have reconditioning capability. Such movement is coordinated with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the other states' officials.

**Non-Food Products:**

If non-food packaged products are wholly or partially destroyed, lack of labeling, if specified in state or local ordinances may render such products unsalable under normal circumstances.

Sale to an industry, institution or charitable organization may be permitted if properly invoiced.