

## FOOD SAFETY AFTER A FIRE OR A FLOOD

### Retail Food Facilities

Retail food facilities that have experienced a fire or a flood must close immediately and may not reopen until inspected and cleared by the Sacramento County Environmental Management Department. To schedule an inspection or obtain further information, please call (916) 875-8440.

### After a Fire

- Discard all food that has been near a fire. Food exposed to fire can be damaged by the heat of the fire, smoke fumes, and fire-fighting chemicals. These fumes and chemicals cannot be washed off. These include:
  - Foods stored outside of the refrigerator, such as bread, fruits, and vegetables.
  - Raw food or food in permeable packaging (cardboard, plastic wrap, etc.).
  - All foods in cans, bottles, and jars. While they may appear to be okay, the heat from a fire can damage the containers and can activate food spoilage bacteria.
  - Foods stored in refrigerators or freezers. Refrigerator seals are not airtight and fumes can get inside.
- Sanitize cookware exposed to fire-fighting chemicals by washing in soap and hot water. Then submerge for 15 minutes in a solution for 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water.

### Flooding

#### *Preparing for a Flood*

- If possible, raise refrigerators and freezers off the floor, putting cement blocks under their corners.
- Move canned goods and other foods that are kept in low cabinets to a higher area.

#### *Flooding - After a Flood*

- Use bottled drinking water that has not come in contact with floodwater.
- Do not eat any food that may have come in contact with floodwater.
- Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance it may have come in contact with floodwater. Food containers that are **not** waterproof include those with screw-caps, snap lids, pull tops, and crimped caps.

Discard cardboard juice/milk/baby formula boxes and home canned foods if they have come in contact with floodwaters. They cannot be effectively cleaned and sanitized.

### ***Flooding - After a Flood cont'd***

- Inspect canned foods; discard any food in damaged cans. Canned food damage is shown by swelling, leakage, punctures, holes, fractures, extensive deep rusting, or crushing/denting severe enough to prevent normal stacking or opening with a manual, wheel-type can opener.
- Discard wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples, and pacifiers that may have come in contact with floodwaters. There is no way to safely clean them.
- Thoroughly wash metal pans, ceramic dishes, and utensils (including can openers) with soap and water (hot water if available). Rinse and sanitize them by boiling in clean water for 2 minutes *or* immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water.
- Thoroughly wash countertops with soap and water (hot water if available). Rinse and then sanitize them by applying a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water. Allow to air-dry.

**Note:** *If your refrigerator or freezer was submerged by floodwaters — even partially — it is unsafe to use and must be discarded.*

### ***Salvaging All-Metal Cans Exposed to Floodwaters***

Undamaged, commercially prepared food in all-metal cans can be saved if you do the following:

1. Remove the labels if possible. They can harbor dirt and bacteria.
2. Brush or wipe away any dirt or silt.
3. Thoroughly wash the cans with soap and water (use hot water if available).
4. Rinse the cans with water that is safe for drinking (if available). Dirt or residual soap will reduce the effectiveness of chlorine sanitation.
5. Then sanitize them by immersion in one of the following ways:
  - Place in water. Allow the water to come to a boil for 2 minutes.
  - or**
  - Place in a freshly made solution consisting of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water (or the cleanest, clearest water available) for 15 minutes.
6. Allow to air-dry for a minimum of 1 hour before opening or storing.
7. Relabel the cans with a marker. Include the expiration date if available.
8. Use the food in these reconditioned cans as soon as possible.

### **Information sourced from:**

United States Department of Agriculture – Food Safety and Inspection Service

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/search?keywords=food+safety+emergency+preparedness>