

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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There's been a lot of rain in our areas recently. Much of it has come with wind, thunder and lightning, to say nothing of all the noise from 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks! The fireworks were intentional, but a power outage from a lightning strike is definitely not! Neither is water in your kitchen, whether from a flood or a leaky roof if a tree fell on it. But these things all happen, too often for comfort, in Florida. So it's a good idea to have an idea of what you can keep and what you can't if the power is out or your kitchen turns into a puddle.

The easiest things to start with are what you CAN keep from your refrigerator if the power has been out for more than a couple of hours. Pickles, jams, jellies and sauces such as Worcestershire, ketchup, soy and tamari sauces have plenty of salt, sugar or vinegar, they're safe. Most salad dressings including mayonnaise will be safe even after several days without power. These items are mostly oil, with some vinegar or lemon juice, and then a little bit of seasonings. Not much grows in oil or vinegar, and a lot of the seasoning is usually salt which will also stop bacterial growth. Opened containers of any food that have been touched by flood waters or dripping water CANNOT be kept.

Hard cheese such as a block of Parmesan will be fine for days. However, soft cheeses such as processed, cottage or cream cheese should not be kept. Sliced, shredded or grated cheeses usually don't keep well and should be discarded. Raw eggs will be okay for at least a day without refrigeration, but cooked eggs are only safe

for a few hours. Once an egg has been cooked it has lost its natural resistance and any bacteria that manage to get in will grow quickly.

Dairy products should generally be discarded, including already sour things like buttermilk. It's true that they're sour because of bacteria. But if anything else starts to grow it will be something wild, not known safe bacteria. So don't take chances, just throw it out. Butter and margarine will keep for several days at least.

Meats, poultry and fish products, whether raw or cooked, should be cooked and eaten right away if possible. Discard after several hours without power. Mixed dishes such as casseroles, soups and stews are also not good after they've been warm for more than 2 hours. These foods will support the growth of lots of bacteria.

Unopened canned goods will be fine if the power has been out. But if they've been in flood water or dripping water they should be disinfected with dilute bleach before they're opened. Use 1 Tbsp of bleach (the label should say at least 5% hypochlorite) in a gallon of water, and soak the cans for 15 minutes. Plastic containers and home-canned goods should be discarded.

Finally, what about the things in the freezer? Of course you know to keep the door closed as much as possible to keep things frozen. But when the power comes back on, check the food. Anything that still has ice crystals in the middle of the package, that feels firm or crunchy when you squeeze it, can safely be refrozen. Most baked goods such as bread and cookies can be safely refrozen too.

If you have meat, poultry or seafood that is not firm in the middle but that still feels as cold as it would be in a refrigerator, these items can be cooked immediately, then frozen as leftovers or cooked meats. Vegetables that are icy in the middle of the

package can also be cooked and refrozen.

What should NOT be refrozen includes all frozen meals, casseroles or mixed dishes commercially or home made, ice cream and any desserts that have an egg or cream-based filling such as cream pies or filled desserts. Be safe, not sorry!

If you have a power outage and need to use some frozen foods quickly before they thaw, here's a good recipe. You can vary both the meats and vegetables to fit your needs. Now, let's hope we never need to use these recommendations!

#### Mexican-Flavored Meat and Rice

1 pound ground beef (or chopped cooked chicken)	2 bell peppers, chopped
1 10-oz pkg frozen whole kernel corn	1 cup salsa
1 14-oz can diced tomatoes with green chilies	1 cup water
1 tsp taco seasoning	1 clove garlic, minced
1 ¾ C instant brown rice	1 C shredded Cheddar or Mexican blend cheese
Salt, pepper to taste	

Brown beef in skillet. Drain excess fat drippings from pan. If using chicken heat chicken in small amount of oil. Add peppers, tomatoes, corn (or other vegetables), seasonings, salsa, garlic and water to skillet. Bring to boil. Stir in rice, remove from heat and let stand covered for 5 minutes. If too soupy return to heat and cook uncovered until as thick as desired. Fluff with fork and sprinkle with cheese. Serves 6.