



Hurricanes can threaten food and water

Although we all like to think that hurricanes will steer clear of the islands, Hawaii has been hit five times in the last 50 years. Knowing what to do immediately before and after a storm is critical.

Question: What steps should be taken as you leave for the storm shelter?

Answer: Turn off gas-supply lines and unplug electrical appliances (with the exception of the refrigerator and/or freezer) to prevent damage from electrical surges. Shut off the main water valve to your apartment or house. This prevents contamination of the clean water already in your water system.

Fill a cooler with ice, a non-breakable refrigerator thermometer and perishable foods and beverages that can be consumed within a few hours. Also, take enough canned foods to last at least 24 hours.

Q: What are the first steps after the storm?

A: The three main areas of concern related to food safety are water, food and kitchen

items such as dishes, cookware and utensils.

If the slightest doubt exists about the safety of your water supply, purify the water prior to drinking or adding to food. A safe way to purify water is to boil it for at least 10 minutes.

If heat is unavailable, add 4 drops of chlorine bleach per quart or 16 drops per gallon of water. Be sure that the bleach ingredient list indicates that the only active ingredient is 5.25 to 6 percent sodium hypochlorite and that the bleach is unscented.

If the electricity was off and the refrigerator temperature rose above 40 degrees for more than two hours, the following foods should be discarded: all leftover stews, stir-fries and soups, as well as raw or cooked meat, poultry, fish, eggs or egg substitutes. Milk, cream, yogurt, soft cheeses and products made with these dairy products also should be discarded (cream-filled pastries and pies, cream-based salad dressings, refrigerator cookie dough, etc.).

Mayonnaise, tartar sauce and prepared horseradish should be

discarded after eight hours above 50 degrees.

Foods that can be kept at room temperature for a few days: butter or margarine, hard and semihard cheeses like cheddar, fresh fruits and vegetables, pickles, olives and vinegar-based salad dressings, barbecue sauce and ketchup. If mold or discoloration occurs on any of these foods, discard.

Remember that all kitchenware should be washed or wiped with a bleach solution to prevent contaminating otherwise safe food.

Q: How about freezer foods?

A: Freezers can maintain a safe food temperature for about two days if not opened. Using a freezer thermometer will ensure that food temperatures stay below 40 degrees.

Partially thawed foods that still contain ice crystals can be refrozen. Thawed foods that were held at below 40 degrees for less than two days can be cooked and refrozen.

As the saying goes, plan for the worst, hope for the best.

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