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Newspaper Column

Removing Odors from Freezers and Refrigerators

Following storms that result in extensive power outages, there are many issues that arise concerning food and appliances.

When a power loss happens, a full, well-functioning, freezer should keep foods frozen for 2 days if the freezer temperature was at 0 degrees F or below. A freezer that is only half-full will keep foods frozen for about 1 day.

If there is an appliance thermometer in the freezer, check the temperature when the power comes back on. If the temperature is 40 degrees F or lower, the food is safe to eat and may be refrozen. Keep in mind that some foods may lose their texture or flavor if they are refrozen.

If foods in the freezer have begun to thaw, you will need to check each item to see if it is safe to eat. Depending on the food will determine whether it is safe to keep. The Extension Office has a chart on how to determine which foods to keep and which foods to throw out. It is very important to remember not to rely on taste or smell as a way of deciding whether or not something is safe to eat.

Another issue that can arise following a power outage concerns food that may become spoiled in a refrigerator or freezer. To eliminate these odors: 1. Remove the food 2. Wash the inside of the refrigerator or freezer with 1 teaspoon of baking soda in a quart of tap water or with 1 cup of vinegar in a gallon of tap water. 3. Let the surface dry. If the odor still persists, use activated charcoal. This type of charcoal is extra dry and absorbs odors more quickly than does charcoal used for cooking. It is sold at drug stores and pet supply stores. To use activate charcoal: 1. Unplug the freezer or refrigerator. 2. Put the charcoal in pans or on paper in the bottom of the freezer or refrigerator for several days. 3. If the odor remains, put in new charcoal. 4. When the odor is gone, rinse and dry the inside of the freezer or refrigerator. 5. Turn on the freezer or refrigerator and it is ready for food. If the odor gets into the freezer's insulation, contact the manufacturer for suggestions on solving the problem. However, sometimes nothing can be done to eliminate the odor.

For additional information concerning food safety following a power outage or a list of "Foods: What to Keep and What to Throw Away When the Power Goes Out", please contact the Rusk County Extension Office at 903-657-0376.