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NEWS RELEASE

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Food Safety in an Emergency

When it comes to food safety, throwing away a container of mayonnaise that has not been kept at an appropriate temperature is being safe and not sorry. Unexpected home emergencies can make it challenging to decide how to keep foods safe, increasing the potential for foodborne illness. Power outages are a common part of emergency situations. Whether there is a fire, severe storm or flood, it is likely the power will be interrupted and your refrigerator will be without electricity. This means you should be prepared to keep perishable foods cold and know what and when to discard if they are no longer safe.

Perishable foods or foods that need to be refrigerated should be kept at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below and frozen foods should be kept below 0 degrees Fahrenheit. These temperatures are difficult to maintain when the power is out. Keep refrigerator doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature. A full refrigerator will hold a safe temperature for up to 4 hours and a freezer for 2 days. If you know the power will be out for a long period of time place a block of dry ice or a bag of packed ice in the refrigerator or freezer to help keep food cold. Fifty pounds of dry ice should hold an 18-cubic square foot full freezer for 2 days. Here are a few more tips to help evaluate if your food is safe to eat:

- When in doubt throw it out. Never use a taste or smell test to determine if food is safe. First check the thermometer in the refrigerator and freezer for the appropriate temperatures. If your refrigerator says 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below, then the foods are safe to keep. If the thermometer in your freezer says 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below, then the foods are safe and may be refrozen.
- If there is not a thermometer kept in the freezer than each item should be checked individually. If the food in the freezer still contains ice crystals it is safe to keep.
- Discard any perishable items such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs or leftovers that have been above 40 degrees Fahrenheit for more than 2 hours.
- Be sure to discard any foods that have come into contact with thawing meat, poultry or fish juices.

Packing ice in a cooler to store your perishable foods in is a practical way to ensure they will stay cold until you have a proper place to store them. Leaving perishable foods outside during night hours will not ensure that your food is safe in the morning due to hourly temperature changes.

Be prepared for an emergency ahead of time. Purchase thermometers for both your refrigerator and freezer to keep accurate temperatures. Designate a cooler for foods to be stored in should the power go out. Locate a store near you that carries dry or packed ice for an easy pick-up. You can learn more about food safety and nutrition by contacting the UCCE's Nutrition BEST program at (530) 889-7350 or visiting our website at <http://ceplacer.ucdavis.edu>.

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