

Food Facilities and Flooding: Problems and Solutions

During a flood event, water, sewer and natural gas lines can rupture and break. Electrical and power supply lines may also be broken, and services interrupted. Given these potential problems, below are some guidelines that should be followed.

1. **PROBLEM: Water service is lost or water lines are damaged.**

If water service is interrupted or contaminated, water from these lines cannot be used for drinking, cleaning or cooking. Potentially contaminated water lines supplying water to drinking fountains, coffee machines, soft drink/soda machines and ice machines are not safe for use. Sinks used for cleaning and hand washing are also considered off limits due to the contaminated water supply. If the water system is used, there is a risk of injury or death due to the contamination of the water source.

SOLUTION: A food facility cannot operate safely without a potable (uncontaminated) water source. The facility must close and wait for a suitable water source to be restored. Contact with our Division should occur prior to attempting to re-open after a problem with the water system.

2. **PROBLEM: Electrical outage.**

If the electrical supply is interrupted or completely out, food stored in refrigerators or freezers may spoil, depending on the duration of the power outage. If the power is out, **DO NOT OPEN** these units, if possible. An unopened refrigerator should be able to maintain a temperature of 45°F or below for up to 4 hours. A refrigerator that has been opened may maintain this temperature for less than 2 hours. Under the California Health and Safety Code, food must be maintained at 41°F or below or 135°F or above at all times. Frozen foods once thawed cannot be refrozen.

SOLUTION: The facility will need to close until power has been restored. Focus on the food and try to salvage as much of the perishable foods as possible, if safe to do so. Try to keep readily perishable foods at 41°F or below. Use clean uncontaminated ice to help keep these foods at the proper temperature. Do not use food for human consumption if it has been above 41°F for over 2 hours. Any spoiled foods should be put into sealed plastic garbage bags and disposed of in the dumpster or garbage bin. Make sure the dumpster lids are closed to prevent fly breeding and access by rodents.

Grounded in Health

3. PROBLEM: Sewage line problem.

If the sewer line has been ruptured or broken, any water or sewage from the food facility may either tart backing up inside the facility and/or overflowing outside the facility. This can cause potential health risks and may lead to the transmission of diseases to humans and contamination of food and equipment.

SOLUTION: The food facility must immediately close and must contact our Division for approval prior to re-opening. Immediately discontinue the use of all toilet facilities and any discharges of wastewater. Try to berm and contain sewage discharges outside the building to prevent a greater risk to the public and use chlorine or bleach to help disinfect the area. Any food, including cans or bottles, contaminated by the sewage must be properly disposed of in the dumpster or garbage bins and CANNOT be washed and re-used. All floors and contaminated equipment must be properly cleaned and disinfected.

4. PROBLEM: Broken gas line.

If gas lines are ruptured and service is interrupted, some equipment in the food facility may not be functional, including stoves for cooking, steam tables for hot foods and water heaters for hot water.

SOLUTION: Food facilities may have a problem operating without natural gas service. If the facility has a gas water heater, any multi-use utensils such as plates and silverware can not be properly washed or sanitized. Single service utensils would have to be used, such as paper or plastic plates and cups and plastic knives, forks, and spoons. Furthermore, employees would not be able to properly wash their hands, cutting boards and other cooking equipment and utensils without hot water. Unless the facility has an electric water heater or is a totally pre-packaged food facility, the facility must close until service is restored and then contact our Division when they are ready to re-open.

5. PROBLEM: Fire.

Fires are sometimes caused during an earthquake or other disaster.

SOLUTION: If your food facility is involved in a fire, it must be closed immediately and inspected by our Division prior to reopening.