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Health officials caution residents without power about food safety

Extensive power outages caused by severe storms Friday across West Virginia has officials with the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Office of Environmental Health Services concerned about food safety.

Director of OEHS Barbara Taylor said "It's important for residents who have been without electrical power or back-up generators to dispose of any perishable food items that have been stored at temperatures greater than 41 degrees Fahrenheit for longer than 4 hours to help eliminate the possibility of food contamination. Foodborne illness can be serious and poses significant health risks."

Taylor said that in addition to individuals and families, supermarkets, convenience stores and restaurant owners need to be cautious too. Taylor said, "When in doubt, throw it out."

Taylor offered the following tips to help ensure your food is safe while waiting for electricity to be restored:

1. Destroy all perishable foods requiring refrigeration if their temperature has been above 41 degrees Fahrenheit for more than 4 hours.
2. Frozen foods in a closed freezer should remain frozen up to 24 hours after losing electrical power. After 24 hours, if the food is still partially frozen, it should be safe to refreeze.
3. Destroy all frozen foods that have thawed and have been stored at temperatures above the 41 degrees Fahrenheit danger zone for more than four hours.

More information about food safety and foodborne illness is available online www.wvdhhr.org/oehs/phs or by calling your local health department.