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FOOD & CONSUMER SAFETY
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LICENSED ESTABLISHMENT GUIDANCE

- FOOD SAFETY IN AN EMERGENCY -

This guidance is a quick reference for food service operators experiencing an emergency. Any situation which requires a change in the usual operations can be considered an emergency, including a sewage back-up, power outage, fire, flood, earthquake, winter storm, tornado, volcano, explosion, chemical spill, vandalism, or transportation wreck. This guidance is based on the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) Title 37, Chapter 110, subchapter 2, standards for retail food service establishments.

Your Safety Comes First Take care of your health, sleep and nutritional needs first. Take care of your family. Wait until buildings and work areas are safe before you return. Follow advice from local emergency officials and utility companies. Dangers include electrical shock, falling rubble, escaping gasses and unstable ground.

Assessment and Response In an emergency, routine operation is not possible. Contact your local health authority or sanitarian, as required in ARM 37.110.206(7). You may need to close part or all of your operation if you are without electricity, gas, safe potable water or sewer service. For a short-term loss of electricity or other services, your local sanitarian can give approval to any alternative operations that ensure food safety. Unaffected areas of the establishment may remain open while repairs and clean-up occur in other restricted areas. Your local sanitarian can help you determine if food and beverages can be safely utilized or must be thrown away.

Re-Opening Make sure there is a person-in-charge responsible for assessing and ensuring food safety requirements. A food establishment which had to close may not re-open until authorization is given by the local sanitarian. Before resuming food preparation and service, all food contact surfaces, equipment and utensils need to be cleaned and sanitized. Equipment must be working properly and maintaining the right temperatures. Water lines, food equipment, including ice machines may need to be flushed and sanitized. Damaged equipment that cannot be restored to safe sanitary standards must be discarded.

Water, Wastewater, and Solid Waste When water service is interrupted, refer to the "Montana Licensed Establishment Guidance for Water Emergencies", available from your sanitarian or Food and Consumer Safety. You must have enough clean water for food preparation and utensil cleaning and sanitizing. Make sure adequate handwashing facilities with clean running water, soap, and paper towels are available where food is prepared and served and where dishes are washed. The wastewater system must be operational, accepting all liquid waste. Food preparation and dishwashing may not take place when sewage has backed up or floodwater is on the floor. Garbage must be removed from the premises at least weekly to a licensed landfill.

Handwashing Wash hands with soap and clean water for at least 20 seconds. If you have touched flood waters or sewage, wash hands twice. Use a paper towel to turn off faucets. Wash hands before any food preparation and after any activity that could contaminate hands. Contact your local sanitarian on how to set up a temporary or portable handwashing station. A person with any sign of contagious illness can only do jobs that do not require contact with food, food equipment, utensils or linen.

See back side for more information.

Damaged Food Containers Throw away broken, screw-top, crown-capped and flexible packages exposed to contaminants or dirt, including flood water, fire retardant, smoke, chemicals or fumes. Hermetically sealed packages and metal cans in good condition may be salvageable with approval from the local sanitarian. In all situations, if in doubt, throw it out.

Keep Hot Foods Hot and Cold Foods Cold Retain cold air by keeping refrigerator doors closed and covering open retail cooler cases. To keep bacteria from growing, foods need to stay out of the "danger zone". Keep potentially hazardous foods (PHFs) cold below 41°F, or hot above 135°F. If you are using ice to keep foods cold, then the food must be completely surrounded by ice, not just sit on top. If PHFs are in the danger zone for more than 4 hours, they must be thrown away.

Cooling & Reheating Keep food preparation simple by avoiding the cook-cool-reheat cycle. If PHFs need to be cooled, they must be brought from 135°F to 70°F within 2 hours, then to 41°F within 4 hours, for a maximum cooling time of 6 hours. Your local sanitarian can give you tips on how to use quick methods of cooling such as shallow pans, portioning, ice baths or using ice as an ingredient. When reheating previously cooked and cooled food, bring up to 165°F within 2 hours. Commercially prepared food must be heated to 140°F for hot holding.

Frozen Foods Keep freezer doors closed. Thaw frozen foods under refrigeration, under cool running water, or in the microwave as part of the cooking process. Partially thawed frozen food can be used, kept below 41°F or refrozen, when the food has not exceeded 41°F on the outside.

Cooking Temperatures Use a food thermometer to check for minimum internal cook temperatures:

Vegetables, fruits - 135°F
Fish, seafood, pork, beef, bison, lamb - 145°F
Ground meats, fish fillets, injected meat, eggs - 155°F
Poultry, wild game, stuffed meat or pasta, stuffing, microwaved foods - 165°F
Other cooking and sashimi requirements - contact your local sanitarian.

Stop Cross-Contamination Wash, rinse, sanitize, and air dry utensils, equipment and any food contact surface. Sanitizing must be at 100-200 ppm chlorine, not more than 200 ppm quaternary ammonia, or in hot water at least 170°F. When hot water is used for sanitizing, the dish or utensil must reach 160°F on the surface. Separate ready-to-eat foods from foods needing cooking or washing. Utensils being continuously used must be kept below 45°F, above 135°F, under clean running water or replaced after 4 hours of use. Sanitizing wiping cloths must have 200-400 ppm chlorine or not more than 400 ppm quaternary ammonia. Use test strips and thermometers to make sure your sanitizing is effective. Minimize bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods by using utensils and single-use gloves.

Planning Ahead This guide is to help you in the event of an emergency, but you can do a lot to prepare in advance. Refer to the "Montana Food Defense & Emergency Response Guidelines for Retail or Wholesale Establishments", available from your sanitarian or Food & Consumer Safety. Keep contact information up to date. Consider access to canned heat, generators, refrigerated trucks, refrigerated warehouses with back-up generators and ice delivery. Keep in mind dry ice should not be used in enclosed spaces because of the build-up of carbon dioxide.

For more detailed information, contact your local sanitarian or view the "Emergency Action Plan for Retail Food Establishments" from the Conference for Food Protection Committee, available at the Montana Food & Consumer Safety web page, www.fcss.mt.gov.

Local Contact Information:

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