
Food safety after a fire

Summary

- When in doubt, throw it out!
 - Wash and dry hands thoroughly with soap using clean, drinking-quality water before preparing food.
 - Ensure food preparation surfaces are safe to be used for food handling by checking for damage and thoroughly cleaning.
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After a fire, smoke and other contaminants from burning materials can potentially affect food.

- When in doubt, throw it out!
- Be thorough when inspecting your kitchen for damage from smoke, heat, water, and firefighting foam.
- Throw out all food items, sealed or unsealed impacted by the fire, as they could be contaminated. This includes food in cans and jars even if they appear OK, any raw food, and food packaged in cardboard and plastic wrap.
- Get rid of food that is smelly, slimy, mouldy or discoloured.
- Throw out food from a refrigerator if the power has been off and the food is no longer cold to touch (less than 5°C). Throw out the food if you are unsure whether the power has been off more than four hours.
- Once cold or frozen food has warmed or thawed, it should be thrown out.
- Many kitchen appliances such as fridges, freezers, and microwaves may be damaged, even if they seem to be functioning right after the fire. Inspect them thoroughly. They may need to be replaced. Contaminants may accumulate on sensitive electronic circuits, that may cause short-circuiting.

Personal Hygiene

- Wash and dry hands thoroughly with soap using clean, drinking-quality water before preparing food. Use alcohol-based hand sanitiser if the supply of drinking-quality water is limited and your hands are not visibly soiled.
- If you rely on a private drinking water supply and this has been affected by bushfires, use an alternative supply of water which is known to be safe for cooking or preparing food, washing utensils and surfaces (for example bottled water for drinking).
- If you are unwell do not prepare food for anyone else.

Cleaning and sanitising

After an emergency, it is important to ensure surfaces like benches and food utensils are safe to be used for food handling.

- Carefully check dishes, pots, pans, cutlery and kitchen equipment that might have been damaged or contaminated by the fire.
- Throw away any damaged or cracked items, items made from porous material such as wood, plastic or rubber including wooden chopping boards as they cannot be adequately sanitised.
- Wash cooking utensils, cupboards and counters, refrigerators and freezers using hot soapy water, then sanitise with 1 tablespoon of chlorine bleach per 2 litres of hot water and rinse with drinking quality water before use.
- For further information and advice on mould issues, contact the Environmental Health section of your local council or refer to the [Mould and your health](#) web page.

Disposal of food

- Contact your local council if you are unsure of how to discard food waste in your area.

Food premises

If you are concerned about **food safety during and after power outages**, please contact your local council environmental health officer. For more information on food safety, visit the **[health.vic food safety section](#)**.

Where to get help

- **Food Safety** Hotline. Tel. 1300 364 352
- Your local council environmental health officer. Find your council's contact details via the **[Know Your Council website](#)**.

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

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