

# Preparedness for Food Service Establishments

Permitted food service establishments can take certain precautions to minimize product loss and maximize food safety as a result of events such as power loss and flooding. Consider the following to help ensure compliance with NC Food Code requirements.

## The FOUR Basics that must be in place before opening:

Physical Safety	Safe Water	Approved Wastewater Disposal	Safe Food
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### \*\*1-Physical Safety

#### Electricity:

If a food service establishment has been effected by flood waters and still has electrical power, an electrical safety hazard may exist. Contact the local Planning & Inspections Department before doing any work in the establishment. The level of danger from electrocution varies depending on the amount of flood water that entered the establishment. There may be little or no risk if water did not get deep enough to contact any electrical connections or outlets. There may be concerns associated with hidden junction boxes and any existing wiring that does not meet code which may have gotten wet.

If there is a potentially dangerous situation, power should be disconnected to the establishment and a temporary power pole should be installed to provide a safe source of electrical power so the establishment can conduct cleanup activities that require electricity.

#### Generators:

**No generator should EVER be connected directly to the panel box without the approval of the local Building Code Official.** The best time to do this is before a storm, by having an electrician install the proper transfer switch. Since this is a commercial business, to ensure public safety ALL work must be done under a permit issued by the local code enforcement office.

Portable generators can be used for equipment that can be directly plugged to them. Equipment that has been flooded or otherwise damaged should not be used. Generators should never be operated inside a building due to the risk of carbon monoxide.

### \*\*2-Safe Water

#### Public Connections:

Public water supplies will issue notices and advisories regarding the safety of the water supply. If a **NOTICE** is issued, the food service establishment permit will be suspended until the water supply is safe. This is a time for foodservice staff to empty, clean, sanitize or discard anything that may have come in contact with or may have been made with contaminated water. Such items include ice machines, soda fountains, coffee makers, etc. If the establishment has a fully operational high temperature dish machine, it may be used to wash contaminated items. While chemical sanitizers are generally effective under normal operating conditions, they may not be effective in water contamination situations. When the water supply is considered to be safe, normal operations can resume.

If an **ADVISORY** is issued, then the food service establishment can remain open for operations with certain extra precautions in place. The establishment can use bagged ice from an approved ice manufacturing facility, use bottled water & drinks, and serve food that has been cooked or made with bottled/boiled water. Follow cleanup guidelines as mentioned above.

#### Individual Establishment Wells:

If a well has been flooded or otherwise damaged, it needs to be tested prior to use. Flood waters contain many contaminants that can affect water safety.

### \*\*3-Approved Wastewater Disposal

#### Municipal or Public Connections:

If there is nowhere for the sewage to go, the establishment's permit will be suspended. Sewage collection can be affected by a variety of things during a disaster. Water conservation efforts must be put in place to help minimize sewage spills down the line or backup into an establishment.

#### **On Site Wastewater:**

Systems that have been saturated with flood waters need time to dry out to operate properly. Many wastewater systems rely on electricity to function. These systems should not be used until they are in good working order. Pouring just a few gallons of water down the drain can cause a backup of sewage into an establishment. Sewage backup into an establishment requires immediate permit suspension.

## **\*\*4-Food Safety**

#### **Contamination and Adulteration**

Food that has been contaminated or adulterated BEFORE or during its time in a food service establishment is considered unsafe to eat and must be discarded. Any food that cannot be verified as safe must be discarded. When in doubt, throw it out.

#### **Physical Contaminants:**

Physical contamination of food can come from any number of sources, including flood waters, building or equipment debris, broken containers, fire extinguishers, etc. Food that has been contaminated must be discarded. An exception to this is canned foods. Cans that show no evidence of damage can be cleaned & sanitized and used as long as the food inside will be cooked thoroughly to 165F.

#### **Biological contaminants**

Temperature is the key to controlling most biological contaminants. **If the power has been off for more than 4 hours, refrigerated foods need to be evaluated to determine what can be kept. Contact your local Health Department before operation. If the power has been off for less than 4 hours**, the refrigeration is operating properly and proper food safety practices are in place, it is safe to assume that the food has not been in the danger zone for longer than 4 hours.

Frozen foods that have not exceeded 41F can be refrozen or maintained at refrigerator temperatures. Frozen foods that have, in whole or in part, exceeded 41F for longer than 4 hours must be discarded.

## **Plan to Minimize Loss In Preparation for Disaster**

While a blanket set of operational guidelines CANNOT be put in place for an establishment that will guarantee an "OK" to operate during a disaster, there are some things that can be done in advance to minimize loss.

#### **Food Protection**

Put as many perishables in the freezer as possible prior to a disaster. A packed freezer will keep food below 41F longer than a refrigerator will.

#### **Water Supply**

Buy bottled water before the storm or fill gallon jugs of water. Bottled water can also be frozen and used as space fillers in freezers.

#### **Ice**

Put leak-proof containers of ice in the freezer. This will provide a safe source of ice after a disaster and can also help to keep a freezer cold during a power outage. Putting ice in prep/sandwich units too close to a thermostat/sensor could trigger a defrost cycle or prevent the unit from cycling on and circulating air.

**Wastewater:** If a power failure is anticipated and an establishment has a wastewater pump tank, it is advisable to use the manual setting on the pump control box to reduce the amount of water in the pump tank. This will free up extra storage capacity for wastewater during response time. Contact the system operator or the Local Health Department for guidance.

**Portable generators are great to prevent loss & assist with recovery efforts. They are not intended to replace approved power supplies for food service establishment operation. Always use in accordance with manufacturer's safety guidelines.**