



Severe Weather Guidance

For Food Establishments



Applicable Laws and Rules

Food establishments must adhere to specific regulations to ensure food safety during a severe weather event. Key regulations include:

- [FDA Food Code §8-404.11](#) – This section outlines the requirements for operating during emergencies, including fire, flood, power outages, or water interruptions. It emphasizes the need to prevent foodborne illness and ensure safe food handling practices.
- [15A NCAC 18A .2600](#) – Rules Governing the Sanitation of Food Service Establishments, which serve as the regulatory basis for food service operations within North Carolina.
- [NCGS 130A-23](#), [NCGS 130A-248](#) – North Carolina General Statutes, which give legal requirements for all food establishments to have a permit to operate and provide the conditions under which a permit can be suspended (imminent hazard).

Procedures During a Severe Weather Event

Immediately upon experiencing a hurricane, flood or other severe weather event, food establishments should follow these procedures to protect food safety:

1. **Evaluate Safety of Building:**
 - a. Do not enter a building that has suffered significant structural damage, where standing water creates a potential safety hazard, or any other situation where the building may be unsafe.
 - b. Contact local building code officials to have building cleared for occupancy if there are questions about the safety of the building.
2. **Floodwater, Smoke, Dust or other Debris Contamination:**
 - a. Check all food, equipment, and utensils for potential contamination from the severe weather event. Floodwaters carry unknown risks and should be considered contaminated. Any food or food packages that contact floodwater should be discarded.
 - b. Single service utensils or other single service articles must be discarded if they show any signs of contact with floodwater, smoke, or other storm debris.
3. **Water and Wastewater Systems:**
 - a. Ensure that adequate water and hot water is available for use during operation. Facility must be able to maintain hygienic standards throughout operation. If there is no water, or inadequate water pressure for handwashing, ware washing and other needs, facility must close.
 - b. Check to make sure that the sewage system is functioning properly post storm. Follow directives from local authorities regarding waste disposal and cease operation if there is inadequate disposal of waste.
4. **Evaluate Equipment:**
 - a. Check the temperature of refrigerated foods and ensure that all cold holding equipment is functioning properly. All cold time/temperature control for safety foods should be below 41°F.
 - b. Evaluate all other equipment, such as cooking, hot holding, and warewashing equipment, to ensure minimum requirements are available for operation.
5. **Discontinue Operations if Unsafe:**
 - a. If conditions become unsafe (e.g., lack of temperature control, inadequate lighting or ventilation, inability to maintain hygiene), discontinue operations immediately. The health and safety of both employees and customers are paramount.

Emergency Operations Plans

A well-defined emergency operations plan is crucial for managing power outages effectively. The plan should include:

- **Minimum Food Establishment Requirements**
 - Clearly define the minimum requirements needed for an establishment to operate during a severe weather event. This includes a safe building structure, power source, potable water source, wastewater disposal, etc.
 - When minimum requirements cannot be met, establishment must close.
- **Backup Power**
 - If possible, have a backup power source (e.g., generator) to maintain refrigeration, lighting, and essential equipment during a severe weather event.
 - Ensure the generator is properly maintained and tested regularly.
 - Have a plan for providing alternate lighting (e.g., flashlights, battery-powered lanterns) to maintain visibility.
- **Monitoring Food Temperatures**
 - Continuously monitor the temperature of refrigerated and frozen foods. Keep a detailed log of temperature readings.
 - The FDA Food Code states that refrigerated foods should be held at 41°F (5°C) or below. Frozen foods should remain frozen.
- **Adequate Water and Wastewater Disposal for Operation**
 - Ensure an alternative potable (safe for human consumption) water source (e.g., bottled water, mobile water tanks).
 - Provide detailed procedures for maintaining hygiene and sanitation during water disruption.
 - Ensure there is a method for wastewater disposal, either working municipal sewer system or alternate arrangement to properly dispose of all waste water.
- **Disposal Protocols**
 - Establish clear protocols for disposing of unsafe food. Discard any time/temperature for safety (TCS) foods that have been above 41°F (5°C) for more than 4 hours.
 - Dispose of any food, ice, or beverages that may have been made with contaminated water.
 - Clearly label and segregate food intended for disposal to prevent accidental use.
- **Communication Plan**
 - Establish a communication plan to notify staff and customers about the power outage and any operational changes.

Requirements for Reopening

Before resuming operations after a severe weather event, food establishments must ensure the following:

- **Restoration of Power**
 - Confirm that power has been fully restored and that all systems are functioning correctly.
 - Verify the temperature of all refrigerated and frozen foods. Discard any foods that have been held at unsafe temperatures.
- **Disposal of Food**
 - Discard all TCS foods that have been above 41°F (5°C) for more than 4 hours. Document food disposal.
 - Discard any other foods that may have been in contact with contaminated water or floodwater, or ice/beverages/food made with contaminated water.
- **Cleaning and Sanitizing**
 - Thoroughly clean and sanitize all food contact surfaces, equipment, and utensils.
 - Pay special attention to areas that may have been affected by the severe weather event, such as any flooded areas, or equipment and utensils that have been contacted by floodwater, debris, or other contamination.
- **Health Department Approval**
 - Contact your local health department when ready to reopen and for steps to take to ensure food safety.
 - Obtain approval from the health department before reopening to the public. An inspection may be required to ensure compliance with food safety regulations.