



Food Safety after a Fire

In Case of Fire

- Post the phone number of the fire department in a conspicuous place by each phone.
- Develop a plan for what to do in case of a fire.
 - Who is to be called after hours?
- Maintain contact information for people that can help you, such as the fire department, police department, insurance company, restoration company for water and fire damage, utility companies, lawyer, local health department, etc.

Affected Operations:

- A non-reportable fire is any small confined fire in a food establishment that has been extinguished using a simple device, such as a wet towel or pan lid. Otherwise, all other fires must be reported to the regulatory authority.
- Fire is confined to a small incidental area or a single piece of equipment and fire is extinguished using a simple fire-fighting device (i.e. hand held extinguisher) that does not require extensive cleanup. Unaffected areas of the establishment may remain open while clean-up and minor repairs are made.
- If the process of fighting the fire, regardless of size, and it contaminates any of the following: foods, equipment, utensils, linens, single service items, etc. discontinue operations. Typically, these fires are associated with the use of high pressure fire suppression devices (i.e., ventilation hood fire suppression system or professional fire department equipment). Resume operations only after recovery steps have been completed.
- Discontinue operations if a fire causes extensive damage to equipment and the facility's structure. Resume operations only after recovery steps have been completed.

Recovery

Recovery involves the following necessary steps for re-opening and returning to a normal safe operation.

A food establishment that was ordered or otherwise required to cease operations may not re-open until authorization has been granted by the regulatory authority.

The Owner/Operator will:

- Contact all other appropriate agencies to determine if the building structure is safe and approved for occupancy.
- Sort the salvageable from the non-salvageable foods as quickly as possible.
- Properly dispose of the non-salvageable food items.

- Provide general clean-up. Clean and sanitize equipment and utensils.

Food Salvaging/General Considerations

If the quantities of food involved are large (i.e., a large supermarket or a food warehouse) it may be feasible to attempt salvage for either human or animal consumption.

The following is a guide for handling specific food items:

Bottled soft drinks: Unless protected by a plastic outer wrap or in bottles with sealed screw-on lids, soft drinks in glass bottles are almost impossible to salvage. In addition, soft drinks in plastic bottles are almost always deemed unsalvageable due to heat and smoke. Bottle contents must be drained before returning the containers for deposits. This can be permitted if there are proper facilities for disposing of the liquid and a health nuisance is not created. If such facilities are not available, the product and container may have to be destroyed by removing to a licensed landfill.

Canned soft drinks: They may be salvaged if the contents have not been subjected to excessive heat or fire. The cans must be cleaned and sanitized, if necessary. If the cans have been subjected to excessive heat or are deemed uncleanable, the contents must be destroyed.

Dairy products: As a rule, dairy products must be destroyed with no attempt to salvage, due to vulnerable packaging and temperature requirements.

Sugars, candies, flour, cereal products, bakery products, dried beans, rice, and other grains: Usually, no attempt to salvage such products can be permitted due to vulnerable packaging.

Products in glass with metal screw-type or metal slip covers: This includes pickles, olives, catsup, steak sauces, salad dressings, syrups, etc. This type of container is impossible to clean or disinfect due to exposure of the threaded closure and must be destroyed.

Fish and meats – fresh or frozen: In almost all instances, these products must be destroyed.

Refrigerated and frozen food: Usually no salvage can be attempted unless frozen foods are stored in a completely enclosed walk-in or cabinet freezer and electrical service has not been interrupted for extended periods. Prompt removal of such foods to a suitable storage unit is necessary to save the product.

Produce – fresh or dried: Usually, no attempt to salvage can be permitted and all such products must be destroyed.

Canned goods: Where the heat and water damage has been minimal, canned goods can be salvaged quickly by cleaning the exterior surfaces and removing them to suitable storage areas, preferably away from the fire scene. Cleaning and re-labeling a relatively small quantity of canned goods is usually not attempted because of the cost involved compared to the lower value of the salvaged product.

Single service items: The operator/regulator must consider soot residue, even on single-service items that are still in plastic sleeves, due to static electricity and transfer. Some operators/regulators may think that the sleeves can be “wiped” off, and, because the items were wrapped, they should be okay for service, when, in reality, they may not be okay.

General Cleanup Considerations

- All areas affected by the fire must be cleaned and sanitized.
- All damaged food products, equipment, utensils, linens, and single service/use items must be removed from the premises as necessary.
- Re-occupancy should be allowed only after the fire department has determined that the structure is safe.
- If an insurance company is involved it is recommended they be notified as soon as possible.

Disposal of Food

If it is determined that food must be discarded:

- Remove to a designated condemned food storage area away from food preparation and equipment storage. Secured in covered refuse containers or other isolated areas to prevent either service to the public, or accidental contamination of the facility and other food.
- If the food must be retained until the distributor can credit the facility, it must be clearly labeled as “NOT FOR SALE”.
- Discarded refrigerated food may be stored in a refrigerated location separate from other food and held for credit until recorded by food supplier/distributor.
- The facility should document the type and amount of food, costs and the reason for disposal for insurance and regulatory purposes.
- If the health department recommends disposition, the products and amounts should be documented.
- Small volumes of food to be discarded can be denatured with a cleaning product (such as bleach) and placed in a covered refuse bin outside the facility.
- Large volumes of food should be stored in covered refuse containers in a secure location and disposed of by a refuse disposal company as soon as possible should also be denatured.

If business is closed for renovation or repairs the plans may need to be reviewed and a reopening inspection be conducted.