

Power Outage FAQs

1. What are the risks to my business if I lose power?

The loss of power can result in health, safety, and sanitation risks, including the following:

- Slip, trip, and fall hazards for customers and employees, absent adequate lighting.
- Hazards with using equipment, absent adequate lighting (e.g., knives).
- Impacts to fire alarms and security systems.
- No hot water for proper handwashing if the water heater is electric or if it's a gas heater but has an electric pilot light. Handwashing is critical for all food facilities. Dirty hands should not contact food items, food packages (including unopened ones), utensils, etc. Handwashing, particularly after using the restroom, is critical for any type of business to prevent disease transmission.
- No hot water for proper cleaning and sanitizing of equipment and utensils.
- Inability to monitor basic food safety requirements absent adequate lighting (e.g., allergens, chemical usage, temperatures, handwashing, etc.)
- Potentially hazardous foods may be subject to temperature abuse and become unsafe if refrigeration stops working.

2. Can I operate my facility if I have a backup generator?

If the generator is operated safely and can provide full power to the facility, including refrigerators, freezers, lighting, hot water, etc., you can operate on a generator. Also check with the local building department and fire department to make sure it is okay with them for you to use a generator. The generator must be able to provide full lighting, refrigeration, freezers, utensil washing, etc. Please note that some gas water heaters have an electric pilot light, so it will need electricity to work.

3. Can I reopen when the power is restored?

Unless you were issued a formal closure notice by Environmental Health, you can resume operation when power is restored.

4. What should I do with potentially hazardous foods when the power is restored?

If potentially hazardous foods have been above 40°F for more than two hours, discard the food items. **When in doubt, throw it out.**

5. Can I still sell prepackaged food and beverage if I don't have power?

No. The health code (section 114182) requires electrical power shall be supplied at all times throughout the entire facility. This is important for employee and customer safety. Additionally, the safe and sanitary operation of a food facility requires a working power supply. See FAQ #1 above.

6. How can I get updates about the power outage?

PGE is posting information on their website: pge.com
Contra Costa County website: contracosta.ca.gov
EMBUD: ebmud.com/psps2019

7. Where can I get additional copies of the Environmental Health power outage flyers?

These are available on our website at: <https://cchealth.org/eh/power-outages.php> or you can call (925) 608-5500.

These are available in the following language: English, Spanish, Chinese-Traditional, Chinese-Simplified, Thai, Vietnamese, and Korean.

8. Can we bring in food from offsite to feed our students?

If food comes from a permitted, fully functional facility, that is an option to consider. If the food contains perishable items, these must be kept at a safe temperature (below 41°). Ideally, the food is individually prepackaged at the other site. You should also consider if it's safe to operate the school without power (e.g., slips, trips, and falls due to inadequate lighting), irrespective of food service concerns.

9. We're a hotel with guests and have lost power; what can we do?

Prior to power outages, it is recommended that such facilities have a viable contingency plan in place. Without power, it may be unsafe to operate the hotel, and for some facilities their contingency is to not operate during power outages. Though the kitchen can't operate without electricity, food could be brought in from offsite if the food comes from a permitted, fully functional facility. Ideally, the food is individually prepackaged at the other site. You should also consider if it's safe to operate the facility without power (e.g., slips, trips, and falls due to inadequate lighting), irrespective of food service concerns.

10. What are some things operators did to deal with the outage?

- A large supermarket transferred its potentially hazardous food to temporary storage in refrigerated trucks in the parking lot, ceased food preparation activities, brought in generators to run lights and the water heater, and restricted its operation to prepackaged food sales.
- One hotel did not accept bookings for times during the anticipated outage, so they didn't have the problem of how to deal with guests (including food service).
- A school canceled food service during the outage and required its students bring lunches from home.
- Some schools closed during the outage.

11. What should be done to plan for the next outage?

A contingency plan is critical, not just for power outages but for other types of events (e.g., earthquakes). If it is feasible, especially for large facilities, backup generators should be considered. Since renting a generator contemporaneous to an event is likely very difficult, your own generator is a more viable option.

Power Outage FAQs (revised October 25, 2019)