

The McDonough County Health Department would like to remind people to take food safety precautions during flooding and power outages.

"Remember: when in doubt, throw it out."

During flooding:

- Residents on private wells need to assure that all water is free of contamination and safe before drinking.
- Thoroughly wash all metal pans, ceramic dishes and utensils exposed to flood water with hot soapy water. Products are safe to use if they have not come in contact with flood water.

Discard these items if submerged in floodwater:

- Home-canned foods;
- All foods in cardboard boxes, paper, foil, cellophane or cloth;
- Meat, poultry, eggs or fish;
- Spices, seasonings, extracts, flour, sugar, grain, coffee and other staples in canisters;
- Unopened jars with waxed cardboard seals, such as mayonnaise and salad dressing;
- Jarred reserves sealed with paraffin;
- Wooden cutting boards;
- Plastic utensils; and
- Baby bottle nipples and pacifiers.

Save these items if submerged in floodwater:

- Commercially canned foods that came into contact with flood water and have been properly cleaned -- Clean them by labeling cans with the name of food in permanent marker; removing labels; washing cans in water containing detergent; soaking cans for at least one minute in chlorine solution; rinsing in clean, cool water; and placing on sides to dry (do not stack cans).
- Dishes and glassware -- Sanitize by boiling in clean water or by immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of one teaspoon of chlorine bleach per quart of water.

During power outages:

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain cold temperatures. Each time you open the door, temperatures rise significantly.
- Refrigerators will keep food safely cold for about four hours if unopened. A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half-full and the door remains closed).
- You can safely refreeze items that still contain ice crystals or are at 40 degrees or below.
- Never taste food to determine its safety.
- Use dry or block ice to keep refrigerators and freezers as cold as possible during prolonged power outages. Fifty pounds of dry ice should keep cold an 18-cubic-foot, full freezer for two days.
- Discard refrigerated perishable food such as meat, poultry, fish, soft cheeses, milk, eggs, leftovers and deli items after four hours without power.

For more information about food safety, contact the McDonough County Health Department at (309) 837-9951