



Keeping Food Safe After a Fire

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When a disaster such as fire caused either by nature or human activity happens, the risk of unsafe food increases. Excess heat, smoke and toxic fumes released from burning materials, as well as chemicals used to fight fires, can cause foods exposed to them to be unsafe to eat. Saving food that has been in a fire is often unwise.

Heat from fire

Food in cans and jars exposed to the heat of a fire may no longer be safe to eat. Heat can activate foodborne microorganisms. If heat is extreme enough, cans and jars can split or break, making the food unsafe.

To be safe, throw away any food that has been burned or near fire.

Fumes and smoke from fire

Fire can release toxic fumes from burning materials. Toxic fumes can contaminate foods both inside and outside of refrigerators and freezers.

To be safe, throw away food exposed to fumes and smoke from fire including:

- Any type of food stored in permeable packaging such as cardboard, plastic wrap, and screw-topped jars and bottles – even if they have not been opened.
- Raw foods, such as potatoes or fruit.
- Foods having an off-flavor or odor.



Chemicals from fire

Toxic chemicals used to fight fires can contaminate food and cookware.

To be safe, throw away foods exposed to chemicals including those:

- Stored at room temperature, such as fruits and vegetables.
- Stored in permeable packaging, such as cardboard, plastic wrap, and screw-topped jars and bottles – even if they have not been opened.

To be safe, decontaminate canned goods and cookware exposed to chemicals:

- Remove labels and relabel with marker. Include the expiration date.
- Wash in a strong detergent solution. Rinse.
- Soak in a bleach solution of 1 tablespoon of regular-strength bleach per gallon of water for 15 minutes.

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References and Resources

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