

## **FACT SHEET: Food Protection and Salvage**

Foods that have come into contact with flood water can be hazardous to health. The only flood-damaged foods that are safe to salvage are those in commercially sealed cans. Such cans can be washed in warm water and detergent and sanitized by placing the washed cans in a solution of household bleach made by adding two teaspoons of bleach to each gallon of water. Sanitizers work best if they are made and used warm or hot. Since it is important that the labels be removed for this process the cans will need to be relabeled with markable tape or with a permanent marker after cleaning.

Foods in containers with screw tops, pressed tops, corks, waxed foil or other kinds of closures are not cleanable because contaminated water can reach the seal and when the seal is broken will contaminate the contents. An exception to this can be made for sealed containers if the containers are washed and sanitized as described above and the contents are cooked before using.

Containers that had been opened before flood damage should not be salvaged. Leaking or bulging containers should also be discarded.

Food products in plastic wrappers, paper boxes, cloth bags and other materials that water can penetrate should be discarded as well. Whole fruits and vegetables can be washed and sanitized as described above for sealed cans. Fruits and vegetables that are salvaged should be consumed only after washing, sanitizing and cooking.

To summarize, the following foods need to be discarded if they have had any contact with flood water:

- Foods in containers that was submerged or wetted by flood waters, even if the closures had been replaced before flooding;
- Unopened, sealed containers that have screw-on lids, pressed-on lids, adhesive seals, corks, snap-top seals, or other seals into which water can partially enter;
- Containers of spices, seasonings, flavorings, extracts, etc. in containers as described above;
- Foods in bins or canisters;
- Jams, jellies and preserves in containers described above or with wax seals;

- Fresh meats, fish, poultry or prepared meats not in commercially sealed, cleanable cans;
- Fresh fruits, vegetables and dried food products;
- Foods in containers made in part or wholly of paper, cardboard, waxed fiber, cloth or plastic film or plastic cartons;
- All bottled beverages, alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, bottled water, milk in bottles or cartons; except for beverages and juices that are commercially canned in conventional metal cans that can be washed and sanitized (as described in paragraph one of this document).

All surfaces in kitchens, dining rooms and other food preparation and service areas should be carefully washed with water and conventional household cleaners and disinfected by swabbing with a bleach solution mixed as described above, before foods are prepared or served following flood damage. All sinks, counters, food preparation equipment, cooking utensils, dishes, cups and flatware should be thoroughly washed and sanitized before use.

Be sure that the water you use for cleaning, sanitizing and preparing food and beverages is safe for drinking purposes. Do not use surface water, water from flooded wells or water from unknown sources for food and beverage preparation purposes. (See fact sheets on water supply safety for more information about water safety)

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