AFTER THE FLOOD
FOOD SAFETY

Steps to follow to prepare for a possible weather emergency, such as a flood:

• Keep an appliance thermometer in the refrigerator and freezer. An appliance thermometer will indicate the temperature inside the refrigerator and freezer in case of a power outage and help determine the safety of the food.

• Make sure the freezer is at 0°F or below and the refrigerator is at 41°F or below.

• Freeze containers of water for ice to help keep food cold in the freezer, refrigerator or coolers after the power is out.

• Freeze refrigerated items such as leftovers, milk and fresh meat and poultry that you may not need immediately — this helps keep them at a safe temperature longer.

• Plan ahead and know where dry ice and block ice can be purchased.

• Have coolers on hand to keep refrigerator food cold if the power will be out for more than 4 hours. Purchase or make ice and store in the freezer for use in the refrigerator or in a cooler. Freeze gel packs ahead of time for use in coolers.

• Store food on shelves that will be safely out of the way of contaminated water in case of flooding.

Steps to follow after a flood:

• Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature.

• The refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) and the door remains closed.

• Discard refrigerated perishable food such as meat, poultry, fish, soft cheeses, milk, eggs, leftovers and deli items if the food temperature if above 41 degrees F. for more than 4 hours.

• Food may be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is at 41°F or below when checked with a food thermometer.

• Never taste a food to determine its safety!

• Obtain dry or block ice to keep your refrigerator and freezer as cold as possible if the power is going to be out for a prolonged period of time.

• If the power has been out for several days, check the temperature of the freezer with an appliance thermometer. If the appliance thermometer reads 40°F or below, the food is safe to refreeze.

• If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine its safety. If the food still contains ice crystals, the food is safe.

• Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with flood water. Discard wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers.

• Thoroughly wash all metal pans, ceramic dishes and utensils that came in contact with flood water with hot soapy water and sanitize by boiling them in clean water or by immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of 1 teaspoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water.

• Undamaged, commercially prepared foods in all-metal cans and retort pouches (for example, flexible, shelf-stable juice or seafood pouches) can be saved.

• Use bottled water that has not been exposed to flood waters. If bottled water is not available, tap water can be boiled for safety.

For more information or assistance, contact Northeast Tri County Health District