Food Safety: After a Fire

For more information, call 719.583.4307 or visit www.pueblohealthdept.org

Fire and smoke create tars, plastics and their by-products. They may remain in the air for a long time. All of these substances make food products unsalvageable. ***Be safe—throw it out.*** *Food exposed to fire can be damaged by four factors: heat, smoke, firefighting chemicals and power outages affecting refrigeration.*

1. Heat: Food in cans or jars may appear fine. If they have been close to the heat of a fire, they may not be safe to eat. Heat from a fire can weaken seams, which may allow bacteria to grow.

- Discard foods in cans or jars, as extreme heat can damage the can or jar.

2. Smoke: Toxic fumes, which can be released from burning materials, are one of the most dangerous elements of a fire. The fumes alone can be hazardous, and they also can contaminate food, right through the packaging.

- Discard all meats, oil products such as butter and produce.
- Discard food stored in packaging with friction-type closures and food packed in cardboard, cellophane or plastic wrap.
- Discard food stored at room temperature, such as fruit and vegetables.
- Discard refrigerated or frozen food with an off-flavor or odor when prepared. Food stored in the refrigerator or freezer may become contaminated by fumes, as food packaging is not necessarily airtight.
- Canned goods and cookware exposed to smoke can be decontaminated if they have not been subjected to severe heat.
- Wash canned goods and cookware with soap and hot water. After washing, rinse in a bleach and water solution. Follow the bleach bottle's labeled directions for sanitizing to make the solution. Then allow to air dry.

3. Firefighting chemicals: Chemicals used to fight fires contain toxic materials that can contaminate food and cookware. While some of the chemicals may be labeled as non-toxic to humans, they still can be harmful if swallowed. These chemicals cannot be washed off food.

- Canned goods and cookware exposed to chemicals from smoke can be decontaminated if they have not been subjected to severe heat.
- Wash canned goods and cookware with soap and hot water. After washing, rinse in a bleach and water solution. Follow the bleach bottle's labeled directions for sanitizing to make the solution. Then allow to air dry.

Discard foods exposed to chemicals, including:

- Food stored at room temperature, such as fruit and vegetables.
- Food stored in porous or temporarily sealed containers, like cardboard and screw-topped jars and bottles.

4. Loss of refrigeration

- Discard perishable food that has been at temperatures above 41°F for more than four hours.
- Discard any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture.
- Discard food in your refrigerator and freezer that looks suspicious, such as foods with liquid or refrozen meat juices, soft or melted and refrozen ice cream or food with unusual odors. When in doubt through it out!
- Never taste food to determine its safety.