

FOOD SAFETY FOR BUSINESSES

Food safety after a disaster.

PLAN. PREPARE. ACT.

Emergencies such as a power outage or disasters such as flooding can have a significant impact on food safety, and have the potential to spread foodborne illness if not managed well.

As the owner/operator of a food business, you must maintain an appropriate standard of food safety in accordance with the requirements of your food licence, even in times of disaster.

Preparing for a disaster

There are a number of steps that can be taken prior to a disaster that will help you act more quickly and effectively after it has passed. These include:

- 1) If the premises are susceptible to flooding, remove food and food handling equipment from low to high areas to reduce the risk of it becoming contaminated by flood water.
- 2) Ensure the appropriate cleaning equipment is available to use after the disaster has passed, such as brooms, mops, hoses and sanitising solutions.

Inspections after a disaster

A food business has a legal obligation to ensure that all food is safe and suitable for sale. Following a disaster, all food items should be inspected for damage. Frozen food must be frozen hard and refrigerated food must be maintained below 5°C.

Partially defrosted food can be refrigerated to complete defrosting. Where refrigerated or frozen food has been above 5°C for more than 4 hours, it must be discarded.

Townsville City Council's Environmental Health Officers may conduct inspections following a disaster to ensure that food businesses are compliant with the *Food Act 2006* and the *Food Standards Code*.

Please contact Council for advice if you are unsure about any part of the *Food Standards* and what it means for your situation.

If your premises have been damaged during a disaster event and are no longer in an appropriate condition to continue trading, an authorised officer may direct you to close until the necessary works are completed.

You may also be directed by an authorised officer to dispose of foodstuffs that may no longer be suitable for consumption due to contamination or temperature abuse.

Disposal of food following an event

All food that comes into direct contact with flood water must be discarded. This includes food stored in sealed cans or bottles, packaged goods and unsealed containers.

Where food is found or suspected to be unsuitable or unsafe (contaminated, affected by vermin or pests, punctured, torn, swollen, rusted or had its security seal removed), the food business must dispose of the unsafe or unsuitable food. If the food business does not do this, then you may be directed to do so by an authorised officer and issued with a *Notice of Seizure and Detention* under the *Food Act 2006*.

Council recommends that you retain all receipts for cleaning, structural repairs, *Notice of Seizure and Detention*, and disposal of refuse for your own personal insurance claims.



Council is not liable for any costs incurred for the premises/business maintaining compliance with the *Food Act 2006*, and will not be directly involved in individual insurance claims.

Council can provide you with information for your insurance company on what has been disposed of, and what repairs were required to bring your premises up to an acceptable standard.

Cleaning up and sanitising the premises

In the event of a flood, it is very common for water to have mixed with overflowing sewers. After removing the visual contamination with detergent and clean water, it is very important to also sanitise all floors, walls and benches.

Bleach is one of the most commonly used chemical sanitisers in the food industry. Plain bleach that is free from fragrances and other additives is generally recommended, to minimise possible contamination or tainting from added chemicals.

Where other sanitising chemicals are used, the manufacturer's instructions must be followed. Ensure that the sanitiser is safe to use on utensils and food contact surfaces.

Building and equipment integrity

The structure of the building and equipment used must be inspected by the business to identify any of the following issues.

- Cavities behind walls, kickboards and other structural voids that have been inundated by flood waters.
- The integrity of laminated surfaces must be checked. Water permeation of the timber may cause swelling or separation, which means the laminated material cannot be disinfected properly.
- Where your premises has been impacted by flood waters, it is likely water may have entered wall cavities which can damage electrical equipment and cause mould to grow.

- The integrity of equipment such as fridges, ovens etc. must be checked to determine whether they are suitable for the safe storage or production of food. To ensure safe operation, a qualified electrical contractor should check all electrical equipment that has been inundated by flooding.
- Soft plastic and porous items such as wooden spoons and chopping boards that probably absorbed flood water must be discarded.

More information

More information on disaster preparation can be found on our website at [townsville.qld.gov.au](https://www.townsville.qld.gov.au) on the Disaster Management page.

The Emergency Management and Disaster Dashboard is at disaster.townsville.qld.gov.au.