

# Avoid financial and physical dangers during storm recovery

**Food safety:** Hurricane Matthew brought significant power outages to the area. The USDA cautions residents who have lost power during the storm, to use extreme care when determining if food is safe to eat. Here are some tips:

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. A refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours if the door is kept closed. A full freezer will hold its temperature for about 48 hours (24 hours if half-full).
- Place meat and poultry to one side of the freezer or on a tray to prevent cross contamination of thawing juices.
- Use dry or block ice to keep the refrigerator as cold as possible during an extended power outage. Fifty pounds of dry ice should keep a fully-stocked 18-cubic-foot freezer cold for two days.
- Check the temperature inside of your refrigerator and freezer. Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, seafood, eggs or leftovers) that has been above 40 degrees for two hours or more.
- Check each item separately. Throw out any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture or feels warm to the touch.
- Check frozen food for ice crystals. The food in your freezer that partially or completely thawed may be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is 40 degrees or below.
- Never taste a food to decide if it's safe.
- When in doubt, throw it out.
- Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with floodwater — this would include raw fruits and vegetables, cartons of milk or eggs.
- Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with floodwater. Food containers that are not waterproof include those packaged in plastic wrap or cardboard, or those with screw-caps, snap lids, pull tops, and crimped caps. Floodwaters can enter into any of these containers and contaminate the food inside. Also, discard cardboard juice/milk/baby formula boxes and home canned foods if they have come in contact with floodwater, because they cannot be effectively cleaned and sanitized.
- Inspect canned foods and discard any food in damaged cans. Can damage is shown by swelling, leakage, punctures, holes, fractures, extensive deep rusting, or crushing/denting severe enough to prevent normal stacking or opening with a manual, wheel-type can opener.

**Water safety:** Ask local officials or read news alerts about whether you can drink tap water or use it for washing. If it's not safe, use bottled water if you can. If you don't have bottled water here are some things you can do to kill germs and ensure the water is safe to drink.

- Bring water to a rolling boil for one minute.
- Add one-eighth teaspoon (or eight drops) of new, unscented liquid bleach to one gallon of water. Stir well. Let the water sit for 30 minutes before you drink it.
- Add water-purifying tablets to water to make it safe to drink. Follow the product's directions.

**Chainsaw Safety:** Check that chain saw is in working order and that chain is lubricated and sharpened. Check the chain tension and never allow it to sag. Keep people and pets away while cutting. Wear protective clothing, hard hats, goggles, boots and gloves. Do not wear loose-fitting clothing. Fuel the chain saw 10 feet away from any ignition source. Keep the chainsaw away from overhead hazards, like hang limbs and utility lines. Never stand on a ladder when cutting. Clear debris and branches from chain saw's path. Keep both hands on the saw's handles and keep your footing secure.

**Price gouging:** It is against the law to sell food, ice, gas and lumber or other essential items for an amount that “grossly” exceeds the average price. If you suspect price gouging, get as much information as possible about the product or service, such as towing and storage. Then report it to the Attorney General’s Price Gouging Hotline 866-966-7226 or at [myfloridalegal.com](http://myfloridalegal.com)

**Choosing a contractor:** Be careful when hiring unknown contractors and be especially alert of door-to-door sales people who promise to speed up the permit process or ask for large cash deposits or advance payments in full. Hire contractors who are licensed by the state or county or both. Get the estimate and the contract in writing. Most homeowners' insurance won't pay a claim from an unlicensed contractor who is injured on the job. In Volusia County, you can call the licensing contractor's office at 386-736-5957 and choose option 2. You can also check at [connectlivepermits.org](http://connectlivepermits.org) and choose the contractor tab, or [myfloridalicenses.com/dbpr](http://myfloridalicenses.com/dbpr) and choose the verify license tab.

**Generator safety:** Proper ventilation for a generator’s exhaust is critical to reducing the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning, which is a common and deadly danger if generator’s are used improperly. Never use generators indoors or outside near windows, vents or air intakes. Get fresh air immediately if you begin feeling sick or dizzy or have flu-like symptoms. Buy a carbon monoxide detector. Keep the generator dry.

**Charcoal grills:** Also, to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning do not burn charcoal or gas grills inside a house, garage, vehicle, tent or fireplace.

**floodwaters:** Floodwaters may contain fecal material. Avoid contact with floodwaters if you have open sores or cuts. Avoid eating or drinking anything contaminated by floodwaters. Wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled before handling food, after using the toilet or after handling items contaminated with floodwaters.

**Sewage backup:** If sewage backs up into your house, wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup. Discard contaminated material such as wall coverings, cloth, rugs and dry wall. Clean walls and hard surfaced floors with soap and water. Disinfect with a solution of 1/4 cup of bleach to one gallon of water.

Source: Volusia County government