

Disposing of Food and Other Household Waste After a Disaster

Orderly clean-up after a disaster is important to prevent the impact of waste on human health and the environment. The North Dakota Department of Health provides the following guidelines for disposing of food and other household waste after a disaster.

Do NOT mix different types of waste or pile different types together for collection.

- Separate food waste, small animal carcasses, diapers, and similar wastes that quickly spoil from other waste.
- Separate hazardous chemicals, paint, materials containing mercury (fluorescent lights, thermostats, etc.), and electronics for proper recycling or disposal. See the “Disposal of Household Hazardous Waste and Electronics” fact sheet at www.deq.nd.gov/flood.
- Appliances that cannot be cleaned and repaired and scrap metal materials should be collected separately for recycling.
- Place any non-recyclable furniture, carpet, books and paper with demolition debris for collection. Be aware some demolition materials may contain lead paint and asbestos.
- Collect concrete and brick for recycling.
- Separate tree branches and other untreated wood to be ground for mulch, etc.

Waste that rots or decays quickly should be kept apart from other disaster debris, placed in heavy-duty plastic bags or containers, and disposed of quickly, including:

- Fruits and vegetables
- Meats
- Dairy products
- Small animal carcasses
- Diapers
- Sanitary products
- Medicines that have been contaminated or spoiled

Food Waste may be unsafe because of damaged containers or because the refrigerator or freezer was without power for a few days. As food waste spoils or decays, it can be a health hazard and may attract rodents and other vermin. Take these steps to dispose of food waste:

- Do not keep any food that may be spoiled or contaminated, including:
 - ✓ Food from refrigerators and freezers, including condiments, pickles, jelly, sandwich meat, milk, juices, etc.
 - ✓ Dry goods in damaged packages.
- Do not keep any household medicines that are spoiled or contaminated.
- Place food waste and other waste that rots or decays into plastic bags and place them in a designated area for separate collection.
- **When in doubt, throw it out!**

Take the following steps to clean refrigerators and freezers:

- Remove everything from the refrigerator or freezer.
- Use paper towels or rags to wipe up spills and leaks and dispose of them with food waste.
- Wash out the refrigerator or freezer with a bleach solution. Use 1½ cups of bleach in 1 gallon of water. Use latex or rubber gloves if you have sensitive skin to avoid irritation caused by the bleach solution.
- Wash out the appliance with warm, soapy water.
- To remove odors, wipe out the appliance with a mixture of water and baking soda, or keep a box of baking soda inside. You also may want to air out the appliance for a few days before plugging it in and using it again. Secure doors in an open position to provide airflow and keep children away.

Check with your local waste hauler or community emergency officials for guidelines specific to your community for the disposal of disaster-related waste.

Please visit Environmental Quality at deq.nd.gov for many other environmental health and safety resources, or contact us at 701.328.5166 with any questions.