

Fire Damaged Foods

Following a fire, many safety issues must be considered before trying to salvage any items from a fire damaged premises.

1. **Ensure the building is secure and has been cleared by the fire department for entry. There may be many health hazards that result from a fire due to the combustion of building products, chemicals, cleaners etc which may combine during the fire, or may change chemically and in stability due to heat exposure. Structural damage, water damage and poor air quality, as well as possible electrical hazards may exist.**
2. In most cases the services of a professional are warranted
3. If the fire was intense, items such as refrigeration units and microwaves may not be safe to use, and the foods in them may have become contaminated by smoke and poisonous gases and contaminated water. As well if power has been off for any length of time, foods in refrigerators and freezers may have been held at unsafe temperatures. In these cases all foods should be disposed of and not salvaged.
4. Discard all open products that have become wet or have been covered in a thick layer of soot and/or are smoke damaged.
5. Wash canned goods if they have not been affected by direct intense heat and appear to be in good condition in a mild detergent and re-labelled immediately after washing.
6. Determine how long any refrigeration units have been turned off. Check for evidence of melting (such as butter or lard), blistered paint, gasket melting or dehydration of food due to heat, fat separation in hamburger, and if the internal temperature of meats is above 4°C. If any of these conditions are found, discard the products inside the refrigeration unit.

NOTE: NEVER open a refrigeration unit until the fire scene has been completely ventilated.

7. All microwave ovens and other electrical appliances should be tested before they can be used again. These items may have been damaged by fire, heat or water and may not be safe to use.
8. Dispose of all single service articles that are fire, smoke or water damaged.
9. Check if the water supply has been compromised by the fire. Ensure the water supply is tested (including chemical and bacteriological analysis) to ensure the fire has not affected the safety of the supply. (Run off from fire fighting foam, and contaminated water may contaminate wells in the area)
10. If the premises is on private sewage disposal contact Land Control Inspectors at the health unit for an assessment.
11. Remove and replace any building materials that have been damaged by water before occupying the premises again.