



Wisconsin Food Code Fact Sheet



RESPONSE TO A FIRE

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Response to a fire in a retail food establishment can be divided into two types: non-reportable and reportable. A non-reportable fire is any small, confined fire in a food establishment that does not contaminate food and has been extinguished using a simple device such as a hand-held fire extinguisher, wet towel, pan lid, etc. All other fires shall be reported to the Regulatory Authority.

It is recommended that the license holder note the date and time of the event. The Person-In-Charge (PIC) should assess the situation and implement emergency procedures. Immediately discontinue operation if a safe operation cannot be maintained or if food safety cannot be assured using an alternative procedure. If there is a significant threat or danger to health, then an imminent health hazard may exist and the license holder should immediately discontinue operations and notify the Regulatory Authority.

Public Health Considerations

Following a fire, one of the primary concerns is food safety. Has food or food packaging been exposed to fire, smoke fumes, water damage, or excessive heat? How have equipment and supplies been affected? Is there an imminent health hazard that would not permit safe operation? Is there appropriate personal protective equipment available? Are other systems impacted, such as the electrical power? Is the overall building integrity safe, as well as safe access to the building? The PIC is responsible for conducting both initial and ongoing assessments to ensure consistent compliance with food safety requirements.

Ability to Operate Considerations

Determine whether the facility can remain open or if parts of the facility can remain operational. Consider the following:

- Have you consulted the Regulatory Authority?
- Are back-up or temporary systems available?
- Has the building inspector, fire department, or other appropriate authority been consulted to determine if the building structure is safe and approved for occupancy?
- Can fire-affected areas be isolated?
- Are specific steps identified to address food, packaging materials, equipment, surfaces, and supplies that have been affected by smoke fumes and fire?
- Can a safe food environment and operation be assured?
- Can alternate procedures be used to meet food safety handling and preparation practices, as well as cleaning and sanitization?



Affected Areas and Operations

If the fire is confined to a small area or single piece of equipment, and the fire can be extinguished with a simple fire-fighting device, extensive clean up may not be required. If a fire causes extensive damage to equipment, the facility's structure, or if smoke has had an impact on food and packaging, discontinue operations. Resume operations only after recovery steps have been completed and the Regulatory Authority has been consulted.

Clean Up Following a Fire

- All areas affected by fire, smoke, and water must be cleaned with soap and water and sanitized with bleach.
- All affected food products, packaging materials, equipment, utensils, linens, and single service/use items must be cleaned and sanitized or removed from the premises.
- Smoke and its resulting damage may have to be removed by a professional restoration company and/or the use of air purifiers, ozone generators, ionizers or other equipment specifically used for this purpose.

Food Salvage and Reconditioning Following a Fire

Bottled drinks: unless protected by a plastic outer wrap or in bottles with sealed screw-on lids, drinks in glass bottles are very difficult to salvage. In addition, if drinks in plastic bottles have been subjected to excessive heat, fire, or smoke, they are almost always deemed non-salvageable.

Canned drinks: may be salvaged if the contents have not been subjected to excessive heat or fire, or if they are cleanable.

Dairy products: must be destroyed with no attempt to salvage if they have been subjected to excessive heat, fire, smoke, water, or have been temperature abused.

Sugars, candies, flour, cereal products, bakery

products, dried beans, rice, and other grains: must be destroyed if subjected to excessive heat, fire, smoke, or water damage due to vulnerable packaging.

Products in glass with metal screw-type or metal slip covers: products such as pickles, olives, ketchup, salad dressing, syrups, etc. may need to be destroyed if subjected to excessive heat, fire, or smoke due to the difficulty of cleaning the threaded closure.

Fish and meats (fresh or frozen): must be destroyed if subjected to excessive heat, fire, smoke, water damage, or temperature abuse.

Refrigerated and frozen food: if stored in a completely enclosed walk-in refrigerator and freezer or enclosed case, and electrical service has not been interrupted for extended periods, some product may be salvaged, depending on the severity of heat, fire, smoke, and water and exposure to these elements. Prompt removal of such foods to a suitable storage unit is necessary to save the product.

Produce (fresh or dried): must be destroyed if subjected to excessive heat, fire, smoke, or water damage.

Canned goods: where heat and water damage has been minimal, canned goods can be salvaged quickly by cleaning the exterior surfaces and moving them to a suitable storage area, preferably away from the fire scene.

Reconditioning salvaged goods: if the quantities of food involved are large (supermarket or food warehouse), it may be feasible to attempt salvage for either human or animal consumption. These items must be destroyed or moved to an approved location that has reconditioning capabilities. Such movement should be coordinated with the Regulatory Authority and/or FDA.



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Disposal of Food

If it is determined that food must be discarded, consider the following actions:

- Place the food to be discarded in a designated condemned food storage area away from food preparation and salvaged foods. Have it picked up as soon as possible by a refuse disposal company.
- Discarded refrigerated food may be temporarily stored in a refrigerator location separate from other foods. The affected refrigerator must be thoroughly washed and sanitized after the contaminated food is removed.
- You may be asked to document the type and amount of food being discarded for insurance reporting.
- All food and hazardous waste must be disposed of in accordance with state and local waste disposal regulations in a licensed landfill or approved facility.

Documentation of Incident/Expense

Make sure a designated person records and documents all incidents/expenses incurred as a result of the fire, including photo and video records, if possible.

Additional Information

[DATCP Food Code Fact Sheets](#)

[Emergency Action Plan for Retail Food Establishment](#)

[AFDO Food Emergency Regulator Pocket Guide](#)



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P-DFRS0214 (09/24)