

Pomperaug District Department of Health

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For immediate release

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Pomperaug Health District Offers Safety Tips After Hurricane Irene

With thousands of households in the state without power, it is important to prevent getting sick from food that has spoiled, water that has been contaminated or from carbon monoxide poisoning. The Pomperaug Health District provides the following tips to stay healthy in the aftermath of Irene:

Food Safety: *When in doubt, throw it out!*

- The refrigerator will keep food at proper temperature for about four hours if the doors are not opened. A full freezer will hold a safe temperature for about 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full).
- If the temperature of the food in your refrigerator or freezer goes above 45 degrees, throw away perishable foods such as beef, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, and cut fruits and vegetables.
- Food can be safely refrozen if it still has ice crystals on it or has stayed below 40 degrees.
- Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water. This includes packaged food items in plastic, paper, cardboard, cloth, and similar containers that may have been water damaged, as well as beverage containers with screw-caps, snap lids, crimped caps (soda bottles), twist caps, flip tops, and home canned foods, as these tops cannot be disinfected appropriately.
- As always, if there is any doubt as to the safety of the food, it is best to discard the food rather than take a chance of contracting a foodborne illness. **WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**

Drinking Water

- Listen for water reports from local authorities to find out if your water is safe for drinking and bathing.
- If an advisory has been issued concerning contaminated water, use only bottled, boiled, or treated water for drinking, cooking, food preparation, and hand washing.
- Homeowners in flooded areas whose private wells have flooded (dug or drilled wells where the cap was partially or completely submerged) should consider their wells contaminated. For information on disinfecting flooded wells, go to www.ct.gov/dph/floods or call the Pomperaug Health District at 203-264-9616.
- Throw away any bottled water that may have come in contact with flood or storm water.

Recovering from Septic Flooding

- Septic systems may become inundated and or backed-up into houses due to flooding. Unfortunately, time is the best remedy for this-wait for the water to drop and eventually the leaching system will start to dry out and become functional. We recommend systems that were inundated or backed-up into houses be inspected by a licensed septic installer as soon as possible.
- If sewage has backed-up into the house, it should be pumped out and all surfaces that are smooth and easily cleanable should be cleaned with a bleach solution. All non-cleanable surfaces should be discarded. It is recommended that sewage back-ups be cleaned by a professional cleaning service.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

- Don't use charcoal grills indoors for heating and cooking, and don't use gas stoves as a source of heat. Either one can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning. A fireplace is safe to use for heat and cooking if it is properly

vented to the outside. In addition, check to see if water or a power outage has affected your furnace and assure that it is venting properly and the pilot light is on.

- Under no circumstances should portable generators be used indoors. This includes inside a garage, carport, basement, crawlspace, or other enclosed or partially-enclosed area, even with ventilation. Opening doors and windows or using fans will **not** prevent carbon monoxide (CO) build-up in the home. Additionally, generators that are outside should be placed away from open windows, doors, and vents that could allow CO to come indoors. The CO from generators can rapidly lead to full incapacitation and death, but CO can't be seen or smelled. Even if you cannot smell exhaust fumes, you may still be exposed to CO. If you start to feel sick, dizzy, or weak while using a generator, get to fresh air RIGHT AWAY - DO NOT DELAY.