

# Cleaning your food business after severe weather



*Dedicated to a better Brisbane*

Precautions need to be taken if your premises has been impacted by severe weather such as flooding or power outages. This fact sheet will help guide you, as a food business operator, to get back up and running safely.

When you first re-enter your business:

- Have an electrician check the property's electrical system before attempting to turn the power on.
- Do not turn power on or use an electric tool or appliance while standing in water.
- If the shop has been closed up for several days, enter briefly to open all doors and windows to let the building air out (at least 30 minutes) before you stay for any length of time.

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*If your business has had any water damage it also may be contaminated with sewage*

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If your food business has been impacted, as the licence holder you must complete the following:

- Sort the salvageable from the non-salvageable foods, equipment, utensils, linens, and single service items.
- Properly dispose of all non-salvageable items.
- Contact a building certifier, electrician and other appropriate agencies to determine if the building structure is safe and approved for occupancy.
- To ensure safe operation, an electrician should check all electrical equipment that has been inundated.
- Have your air conditioning system checked and cleaned by a maintenance or service professional who is experienced in mould clean-up before you turn it on.
- Clean and sanitise all equipment, utensils and food contact surfaces.

## Cleaning and drying out the inside of the building

If the building has been damaged by water, cleaning of the building structure will need to be completed before the food business can re-open.

- Remove any standing water, mud and debris and dry any structure out as soon as possible.
- Remove and discard all wet/damp furniture, fixtures, fittings and other items (such as carpeting, carpet underlay, rugs, upholstered furniture, foam/rubber items, books, wall coverings, paper products etc).
- Remove and discard any wet/damp wall sheeting, hollow doors, and check for trapped water and mud in all affected wall cavities, bathroom vanities, cabinets and floating flooring. This may require the partial or full removal of wall sheeting and floating floors (if wall sheeting contains asbestos you will need to engage a qualified contractor to remove this for you).
- Thoroughly clean all hard surfaces and cleanable items (such as tiled flooring, concrete, mouldings, wood and metal furniture/items, countertops, appliances, sinks, and other fixtures).
- If using a pressure cleaner, ensure areas are cleaned first to remove bulk waste, pressure cleaned and then mopped/wiped down with a hot water and detergent/bleach solution.

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- If you do not have electricity or it is not safe to turn it on, you can use a portable generator to power equipment to remove standing water. Do not use a generator inside a building. Do not use a generator if it or any cables are sitting in water.
- Help the drying process by using fans, air conditioning units, and dehumidifiers where possible.

## Disposal of food

- Dispose of all foods that have been out of refrigeration for longer than four hours, food that has defrosted and any food that has an unusual odour or colour.
- Discard food if packaging is contaminated or if water has covered, splashed, dripped on or seeped into the package. This includes:
  - All opened containers and packages; foods in bags or canisters.
  - Food items in soft packaging or with screw-top lids should be destroyed.
  - Anything with the presence of rust, soil, or destroyed labelling.
  - Exposed foods, bulk foods, fresh produce, meat, poultry, fish and eggs.
  - Any foods packaged in paper, plastic, cloth or fibre.
  - Cardboard boxes, even if the contents appear dry, including cereals, pasta products, rice and salt.
  - Foods with cardboard seals, such as mayonnaise and salad dressing, or foil or cellophane packages.
  - Food cans and bottles that have been inundated or have had their containers or labels damaged. Cans without required labelling information must be discarded as they cannot be used or sold.
  - Food in glass jars, including unopened jars with waxed paper, foil, cellophane or cloth covers.
  - Foods, liquids or beverages in crown-capped bottles or containers with pull-tab tops, corks or screw caps.

## Waste disposal

- Move food to a designated condemned food storage area and secure in covered refuse containers or other isolated areas to prevent either service to the public, or accidental contamination of the facility and other food. It must be disposed of by a refuse company as soon as possible.
- Document the type and amount of food, costs and the reason for disposal for insurance and regulatory purposes. Perishable food may be recorded by the food supplier or distributor or an insurance assessor.
- If the food must be retained for insurance purposes it must be clearly labelled as “DO NOT USE”.
- Small volumes of food to be discarded can be denatured with a cleaning product (such as bleach) and placed in a covered refuse bin outside the facility.
- All food waste is to be disposed of in accordance with state and local waste disposal requirements in a licensed landfill.
- Local transfer stations should be contacted prior to delivery of food from a private individual or carrier to ensure acceptance of the waste.

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## Food equipment and appliances

All equipment and surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned prior to disinfection. The following matters should also be considered following flood inundation:

- Remove any standing water.
- All damaged food equipment, utensils, linens, and single service items must be properly disposed of and not used.
- Floors, walls, furnishings, carpets, utensils, and equipment damaged beyond salvage must be removed and replaced as necessary.
- Affected walls, floors and equipment surfaces must be cleaned with soap and water, rinsed, and then sanitised. Carpets should be either removed or steam cleaned.
- Wall cavities, cavities behind kickboards and other structural voids that have been subject to inundation should be drained and cleaned.
- The integrity of laminated surfaces needs to be checked. Water permeation of the timber may cause buckling or separation rendering the laminated material impossible to disinfect.
- If a product cannot be chemically or heat treated it should be disposed, as disinfection cannot be guaranteed.
- Wall cavities of cool/freezer rooms should be checked for water inundation. Holes can be drilled into the wall (by the operator), which will indicate the extent of water infiltration. If given a few weeks to dry and certification is granted by a qualified refrigeration expert that the integrity of the structure is sound and the walls are sealed, then approval for reuse should be given.

## Sanitising procedures

The most effective method of sanitising of small items such as cutlery and crockery is through heating. Methods to be employed for disinfection of items with heat are as follows:

- Where boiling is not possible or practical, items should be cleaned and then immersed for a minimum of 10 minutes in water above 70 degrees Celsius.
- Where there are usable dishwashers, the temperature of the washing or rinsing water usually can be adjusted with the washing or rinsing cycles to achieve the above.

If the application of heat is not possible use a chemical sanitiser such as a hypochlorite solution (which is readily available and inexpensive). It is recommended using:

- A concentration giving 100 to 200 mg/L of available chlorine (12.5ml to 25ml of household bleach, 4% chlorine, in 5 litres of water) is used for at least 5 minutes.

Where absolute cleanliness cannot be assured, a concentration giving 1,000 mg/L or more of available chlorine should be used to rinse items.

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To clean and sanitise:

- Ensure that all surfaces are cleaned first prior to the application of sanitiser.
- Whatever method is used care should be taken not to re-contaminate surfaces with dirty tea towels etc. and surfaces should be kept as dry as possible.
- Discard mop heads and other cleaning aids that have been in contact with flood water.

Alternatively, you could hire a commercial cleaning service having expertise in cleaning food establishments exposed to floods.

## Personal hygiene and safety

It is important to ensure your own safety during a clean-up.

- Keep children, vulnerable people and pets out of the affected area until clean-up has been completed.
- Wear enclosed shoes with a rubber sole or gumboots, rubber gloves, a mask and goggles during clean-up of affected areas.
- Wash all clothes worn during the clean-up separately from uncontaminated clothing and linen.
- Wash clothes contaminated with rain or sewage water in hot water and detergent. If your onsite water and waste-water system has been impacted, it is recommended that a laundromat be used for washing large quantities of clothes and linens until the systems have been professionally inspected and serviced.
- Seek immediate medical attention if you become injured or ill.
- Don't forget to apply sunscreen, wear a hat when outdoors and drink plenty of water.

## Hand washing

Whilst cleaning your food business after a flood, you should wash your hands with soap and water on a regular basis as this will minimise contamination with already cleaned surfaces.

Likewise, you must clean your hands immediately after working with contaminated materials and before engaging in food preparation activities (working with exposed food, clean equipment and utensils, unwrapped single service/use articles).

## Contacts

If there are any concerns about the health risks in your premises contact Council on 07 3403 8888 and ask to speak with an Environmental Health Officer.

If you are concerned about the structural integrity of the building contact a private building certifier who can undertake an assessment of your property.