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Living Well

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Cleaning Up After a Flood

After a flood has devastated your home or business, there are many things to be considered, one of which is food safety. The information provided below describes how to safely cleanup kitchen areas and food items.

If you are not sure if food has been directly exposed to flood water or if you are not sure if the food is safe for consumption, it is safer to throw out the food. The following food items, exposed (or even possibly exposed or splashed with) flood waters, must not be consumed and should be thrown out:

- *Food items in your refrigerator and freezer, including raw fruits and vegetables, meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and cartons of milk
- *All foods in boxes, paper, foil or cloth, including cereal, juice, and powdered milk
- *Spices, seasonings, and extracts
- *Home canned foods, the area under the seal of the jar cannot be properly disinfected
- *Any food or drinks in containers with screw-caps, pull tops and crimped caps, including mayonnaise and salad dressing
- *Opened containers and packages
- *Flour, grain, sugar, coffee, and other staples in canisters

All undamaged commercially prepared foods in metal cans and “retort pouches” (such as flexible, shelf-stable juice) must be thoroughly washed and disinfected. Throw out damaged

cans, including those with large dents, leaks, swelling, punctures, fractures, or extensive deep rusting. Undamaged cans or retort pouches should be washed and disinfected. This can be done by removing the labels and wiping away dirt and silt. Thoroughly wash the cans or retort pouches with water that is safe for drinking. Sanitize cans and retort pouches by placing them in a freshly-made solution consisting of 1 tablespoon of unscented liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water for 15 minutes. Air dry cans or retort pouches for a minimum of 1 hour before opening or storing. If labels were removable, cans and retort pouches can be relabeled with a marking pen.

Thoroughly wash metal pans, ceramic dishes, and utensils with soap and water, using hot water if available. Rinse and then sanitize them by boiling in clean water or immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of 1 tablespoon unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water. Discard wooden spoons, plastic utensils, baby nipples, pacifiers, and any other porous nonfood items that are used with food.

Wash countertops with soap and water, using hot water if available. Rinse and then sanitize by applying a solution of 1 tablespoon unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water. Allow to air dry.

For more information, visit the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service website at www.fsis.usda.gov. Or, contact the Flint Hills Extension District office in Cottonwood Falls at (620) 273-6491 or the office in Council Grove at (620) 767-5136.