



CANNED FOOD PRECAUTIONS

CAN KEEP YOU SAFE AFTER FIRE

Concerned about canned foods in a home or storage area affected by fire? Are they safe?

Cleanup after a disaster is never easy. Confusion regarding safety makes the process even harder.

Discard any food in cans or jars that have been near a fire. The heat can activate food spoilage bacteria. Extreme heat can split or rupture the can or jar, rendering the food unsafe. If the jars or cans have been exposed to fire-fighting chemicals without heat, they can be decontaminated the same as cookware (described later). Wash and sanitize them, discard the old label, and put on a new label with the name of the product and expiration date (if applicable).

Discard any food in permeable packaging, like cardboard, plastic wrap, screw-topped jars, and bottles that have been stored outside a refrigerator. They may have been exposed to fire retardant and/or toxic fumes released from burning materials. Foods stored in refrigerators and freezers may also be contaminated by fumes. The seals are not airtight.

What about cookware? Thoroughly wash pots and pans exposed to fire-fighting chemicals in soapy, hot water and rinse in clean, hot water. Submerge cookware for 15 minutes in a sanitizing solution of 1 tablespoon of chlorine bleach per gallon of water.

Discard food if near a fire. If food develops an off-odor or flavor, throw it out. This is a sign of spoilage.

For additional information on food safety, contact a county University of Wyoming Extension office, consumer health specialist, environmental health office, or the U.S. Department of Agriculture Meat and Poultry Hotline at (888) 674-6854.

If in doubt as to whether food is safe, throw it out!

Christine Pasley is a University of Wyoming Extension nutrition and food safety educator for Platte, Goshen, and Laramie counties. She can be reached at 307-322-3667 or chrisp@uwyo.edu.