

Emergency Operation Checklist for Food Service Establishments

Most retail food service establishments will eventually be impacted by an emergency that results in an “imminent health hazard.” The definition of “imminent health hazard” can be found in NC General Statute 130A-2(3). NC Food Code Section 8-404.11 allows food service establishments to implement a written emergency operation plan to provide continuity of operations during an imminent health hazard with prior approval from the Regulatory Authority. The checklist below was developed using the [CFP Emergency Action Plan for Retail Food Establishments](#) document and can be used in the developing or reviewing such plans. NOTE: Each food establishment and type of emergency is unique. This checklist may not cover every aspect of complex plans. Please refer to the CFP document and the [Environmental Health Emergency Operations and Recovery Guidance Manual](#) for more information.

General Planning for Emergency Operations

- Identify critical employees necessary to implement the plan and provide current contact information for those employees. *Note: Food Code Section 8-404.11 requires food establishments to notify the Regulatory Authority upon implementation. This should be included in the written plan.*
- Develop and provide “emergency menu” that reduces recipes and requires minimal preparation. Consider reducing the drink menu because ice machines and beverage dispensers will not be operational during water loss, confirmed contamination of water, and power outages.

Water Loss Emergency General Considerations

- Note: The water loss emergency plan must be used for complete loss of water, or for a known contaminant present that cannot be removed by boiling (“Do Not Drink” or “Do Not Use” advisory).*
- Identify an alternate source of water, and how this water will be delivered and stored to ensure it remains an approved water supply. Bottled water is preferred during water emergencies, or the source of the alternate emergency supply should be an approved water system as defined in General Statute 130A-313.
- If bottled water is to be used in food establishments that do not otherwise stock or provide bottled water, provide a business agreement or procedure for procuring water.
- Identify transport and storage containers if ice is being obtained and transported from another potable water source. *Note: ice must be obtained, stored, and transported in a manner that protects ice from cross contamination.*
- Identify a contingency plan for flushing toilets. Plan should include written procedures identifying water source and explaining toilet flushing process and should include copies of all signage to be posted.
- Once water is restored, plumbing fixtures and equipment must be flushed according to municipality instructions. If no instructions are provided, flush fixtures and equipment for at least 5 minutes.

Boil Water Notice General Considerations

- The terms “boil water advisory” and “boil water notice” are sometimes used interchangeably. The official “boil water” documentation from the water authority should provide the necessary information. Contact the water authority to clarify the type of contaminant. *Note: the emergency operation is only required when a water supply has been confirmed to be contaminated with a bacteriological contaminant.*
- Provide information on the water source being used. If water is boiled in the facility, written procedures must be provided and include required boiling time, and storage and handling of water once boiled.
- Equipment which requires potable water and has direct plumbing (ice machines, warewashing machines, beverage dispensers, etc.) must be disconnected until potable water is restored. Equipment must be cleaned and sanitized per manufacturer’s instructions prior to resuming operation
- If bottled water is to be used in food establishments that do not regularly stock or provide bottled water, provide a business agreement or procedure for procuring water.
- Provide signage at all working sinks and water using equipment that water from that source must be properly boiled, or not used during the period of the confirmed contamination of water supply.
- Contaminated water cannot be used for cleaning/sanitizing, washing produce, or other food preparation. Use an alternate water source, purchase pre-washed or ready-to-eat products, and discard any food or beverages prepared with contaminated water.

Employees and Customer Hygiene for all Water Emergencies

- Handwashing sinks must be blocked, labeled, or otherwise identified as out of service. Alternate handwashing procedures must be available.
- Alternate handwashing set-up must include a gravity flow handwashing container with a continuous flow spigot and a catch basin (if equipment allows, water can be allowed to drain into existing sink). Containers must be cleaned and sanitized before filling and must be located to prevent contamination.
- Alternate handwashing must be used for all areas where plumbed handwashing sinks are used, including restrooms, kitchen hand sinks, and other locations.
- Catch basins must be emptied in sanitary sewer. Do this using a can wash, toilet, or other operational drain that does not cause contamination of food preparation or food contact areas. Plans should include requirements for handwashing after catch basins are emptied by employees.
- Establishments must discontinue operations if the supply of potable water is exhausted.

Cleaning and Sanitizing Considerations for all Water Emergencies

- Include information on when the establishment will switch to single service utensils during emergency operations. Provide a stockpile of these items for emergencies, or a plan to obtain them quickly.
- Discontinue use of any warewashing machines or automatic dispensers for cleaning agents and sanitizers. The three-compartment sink and manual wash, rinse, and sanitize procedures must be used for all food contact surfaces. If there is not adequate capacity for manual washing of utensils using potable water, the establishment must either reduce or discontinue operations. Follow manufacturer's instructions for manually mixing sanitizers using boiled or other potable water.
- Pipes must be flushed for five minutes or the recommended time by the water authority before using water for cleaning and sanitizing, and other tasks requiring potable water. Food contact surfaces and equipment must be washed, rinsed, and sanitized before use once potable water is restored.
- Water filters on ice machines should be replaced once potable water is restored and before sanitizing the ice machine in accordance with manufacturer's instructions prior to startup of the machine.

Loss of Power Emergency General Considerations

- In general, operating during a loss of power emergency requires more in-depth planning and written procedures than water emergencies. The menu must be reduced to items that can safely be stored, prepared, and held without power to the establishment.
- Prior to beginning emergency operations, a plan must be in place to assess all TCS food stored under refrigeration. The type of TCS food, temperature of the food, and amount of time it has been out of temperature control can all be considered when determining the corrective action. This assessment criteria may be based on the [CFP Emergency Action Plan for Retail Food Establishments](#) document.
- An alternate source of power or other means must be provided to meet basic safety requirements such as lighting, to power any equipment that is part of the emergency plan. Never place a gas generator in an enclosed area. Location of the generator, if used, must be included in the plan.
- If water is unavailable, or if there is a contaminated water issue, plans must include water emergency requirements above.
- Provide written procedures and information on all cooking, storage, and handling of food items. Any temporary storage and cooking plan must maintain FDA Food Code time/temperature parameters or approved time as a public health control and provide protection from potential contamination.
- Provide a detailed list of all equipment that will be used and how it will be operated. If alternate cooking or storage equipment will be used, it must be intended for indoor use. Extended outdoor operations will likely not be approved through this emergency operations plan. Contact your local health department for outdoor operations approval.