

After a fire, Is the food safe?

Food exposed to fire can be compromised by three factors: the heat of the fire, smoke fumes, and chemicals used to fight fire.

Heat from fire

Food in cans or jars may appear to be okay, but if they've been close to the HEAT of a fire, they may no longer be edible. Why? Heat from a fire can activate food spoilage bacteria. If the heat is extreme, the cans or jars themselves can split or rupture, rendering the food unsafe.

Fumes from fire

Any type of food stored in a permeable packaging -- cardboard, plastic wrap, etc. should be thrown away. Toxic fumes can permeate the packaging and contaminate the food. Discard any raw foods stored outside the refrigerator, such as potatoes or fruit. Surprisingly, food stored in your refrigerator or freezer can also become contaminated by the fumes. The refrigerator seal is not airtight. If the food from your refrigerator has an off-flavor or odor when it is prepared, throw it away.

Chemicals used in a fire

Chemicals used to fight fires contain toxic materials and can contaminate food and cookware. The chemicals cannot be washed off the food. Foods that are exposed to chemicals should be thrown away. This includes food stored at room temperature, such as fruits and vegetables, as well as foods stored in permeable containers like cardboard and screw-topped jars and bottles. Canned goods and cookware exposed to chemicals can be decontaminated. Wash in a strong detergent solution. Then dip in a bleach solution (1 teaspoon bleach per quart of water) for 15 minutes.