

## WHAT ABOUT FOOD THAT HAS BEEN IN A FIRE?

Three factors can affect food that has been exposed to fire – the heat of the fire, smoke fumes, and chemicals used to put out the fire.

The heat of the fire can activate high-temperature food spoilage bacteria in commercial or home-canned foods; these bacteria do not affect canned food under normal circumstances, but after a fire they can make the food inedible. In addition, high temperatures of a fire may cause jar lids of home-canned food to come unsealed allowing bacteria to get into the food; the jar lids may “seal” again when the air temperature drops. Toxic fumes released from burning materials can contaminate food, tableware and cookware, as can toxic components from the chemicals used to fight fire. Use the following guidelines to insure the safety of food after a fire:

- Throw away food stored in permeable packaging such as cardboard, plastic wrap, home-canned food, and screw-topped jars and bottles. Heat damage may have occurred. Toxic fumes and chemicals can get into the packaging and contaminate food.
- Discard raw foods that were stored outside the refrigerator, such as potatoes, squash, or fruit, which could be contaminated by fumes or chemicals.
- Check the refrigerator and freezer for off odors. Because door seals on these appliances are not airtight, fumes can contaminate foods within. Discard foods that have off odors or flavors.
- Decontaminate canned goods, tableware, and cookware which have been exposed to chemicals or fumes using the instructions for cleaning and sanitizing cans after a flood.
- Discard commercially-canned food which smells or looks spoiled, as heat damage may have occurred.

For further information contact Jeanne Darling, Cornell Cooperative Extension 607-865-6531 or email [jmd30@cornell.edu](mailto:jmd30@cornell.edu).