

Family Living
Focus
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Refrigerator Talk

With all the fuss about this New Year's Eve, my mind quickly remembers New Year's Eve 1976 when I was a teen

I was so excited. That evening was to be my very first date with my now husband Russell

Then it happened. The refrigerator died. Of all the days and years in a lifetime, why did our refrigerator have to die mid day on December 31?

Let me set the stage. We lived way off a main road and didn't have a close neighbor to borrow refrigerator space

Who needed a refrigerator when it was only 20 degrees outside? My mother placed all of the refrigerator contents in the main entranceway of our house which had a wide cold doorway with a large stone threshold between the screen door and the house

As a sixteen year old, image was everything. I was so embarrassed that this boy I was desperately trying to impress would have to walk through our make shift refrigerator. As it turned

out, Russell eventually found my house, walked through the refrigerator and has been around ever since

Refrigerators play such an important role in our lives that many times we don't stop to give them a second thought until something goes wrong.

When's the last time you checked your refrigerator's temperature? Consider keeping an appliance thermometer in both the refrigerator and freezer at all times. Set your refrigerator no higher than 40 degrees F. and the freezer unit at 0 degrees F. Check these temperatures occasionally on your appliances thermometers.

As a result of thunderstorms, ice storms and other disturbances, power outages occur more often than we would like. It's not only an inconvenience, but a safety issue, particularly with food. When refrigerators and freezers lose power, we worry whether or not the food will be safe for our families. Knowing how to handle food while power is off and when it is

restored will help ensure that you and your family do not become victims of food-borne illness

If possible, when the power goes out, try to find out how long it is expected to be off. If only a few hours, don't do anything. Open the freezer or refrigerator door as little as possible so the unit maintains its chilled temperature longer

If the power is off for more than two hours, you should begin to monitor the temperature of the refrigerator. Keep the thermometer close to the door opening. This will allow you to open the door slightly and keep the temperature lower. Check the temperature each hour. When it reaches 40 degrees F. you will need to take action to keep the temperature from rising. Place block ice in a container in the refrigerator. You may also consider placing perishable items in a cooler with ice or ice packs placed around them.

If the temperature of the refrigerator rises above 40 degrees F. for more than two hours, you will need to discard these perishable foods: meat, poultry, seafood, cold cuts, hot dogs, casseroles, soft cheeses, shredded cheeses, low-fat cheeses, cream, sour cream, yogurt, milk, eggs, custards, pudding, creamy salad dressings, fish sauces, opened spaghetti sauce, cookie dough, refrigerator biscuits or rolls, cooked pasta, rice, pasta salads, pizza, cut fresh fruit, greens, cooked vegetables, opened vegetable juices, baked or mashed potatoes and potato salad. Any food that has an unusual odor,

color or texture should also be discarded. Never taste foods to determine their safety

Foods that are safe, even if held at 40 degrees F. or above for more than two hours include hard cheeses, processed cheeses that are carefully wrapped, grated Parmesan and Romano cheeses, margarine that is properly wrapped, canned or uncut fresh fruit and fruit juices (but discard if they look, feel, smell or taste unusual), fresh vegetables, canned vegetables, herbs, spices, peanut butter, jelly, relish, taco, barbecue or soy sauce, mustard, ketchup, olives, breads, rolls, cakes, muffins, bagels, pancakes, waffles, opened jars of mayonnaise, tartar sauce or horseradish (unless held at 50 degrees F. for more than 8 hours) then throw them away.

Freezer Safety

A full freezer will remain below 40 degrees F. for about two days, and a less-than-full freezer will maintain that temperature for approximately one day. Rearrange meats to avoid meat juices dripping onto other foods as the meats begin to thaw. Throw away any ready-to-eat

item that comes in contact with meat juices

Frozen foods that have partially or completely thawed can be refrozen if they contain ice crystals. If they have completely thawed, but are still at a temperature of 40 degrees F. or below, they can also be refrozen. Use a meat thermometer to check the temperature of the food. Although partial thawing and refreezing of these foods will be safe, the quality of some foods, especially vegetables and fruits may be reduced. Hard cheeses, breads, fruits, and vegetables and their juices, as long as they look, smell and taste normal, can be refrozen even if above 40 degrees F. for more than two hours.

One way to ensure the safety of meat products that have thawed, but are above 40 degrees for two hours or less, is to cook them immediately. Either serve the food immediately or refreeze the cooked item. Be sure to cook to the proper temperatures, checking internal temperatures with a meat thermometer. Refrigerate and use within two days or freeze leftovers immediately



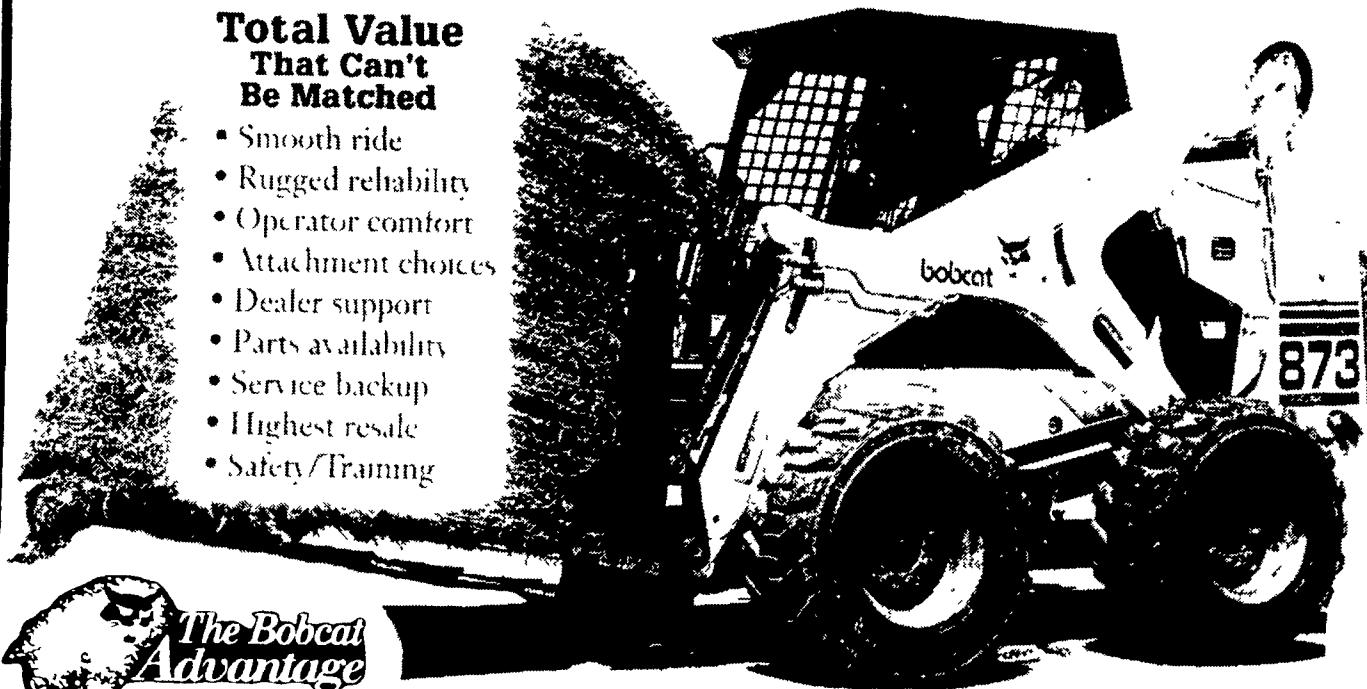
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