



An Extended Guide · No. 1773

Your After-the-Outage Checklist

A calm, step-by-step
once the power's back

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

BillsHomeTech.com · (330) 200-8042 · Atwater, Ohio

Free & printable — share it with someone who needs it



Book a visit —
billshometech.com/book

! Read this first — when in doubt, throw it out

Here is the one rule that keeps your family safe when the power goes out: when in doubt, throw it out. Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors shut, and know the clock — a closed refrigerator keeps food safe for about 4 hours, and a full freezer holds its cold for about 48 hours (about 24 hours if it is only half full). Any perishable food — meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk, soft cheese, cut fruit, and leftovers — that has been above 40 degrees Fahrenheit for 2 hours or more should be thrown out. Never taste food to decide whether it is safe; many of the germs that cause food poisoning leave no smell, taste, or change you can see. The lights coming back on is the start of this checklist, not the finish line.

The power's back — now let's finish the job

Good news first: the lights are on again. The checklist in this guide takes just a few minutes and makes sure nothing important gets missed.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. Almost as often as I hear from folks in the middle of an outage, I hear from them right after: 'The power's back on — now what do I do?' This guide is that answer, laid out one step at a time.

None of these steps are hard, and none take long. The trick is just to work through them in order, calmly, so you don't skip the one that matters most.

★ Want company while you work through it?

If you'd rather have someone on the phone while you go step by step, call or text me at (330) 200-8042. I'm glad to walk through it with you.

The whole checklist, on one page

If you only have a minute, these are the steps that matter most.

- ☐ Read both thermometers before you do anything else.
- ☐ Freezer has ice crystals, or reads 40 degrees or below: safe to refreeze or cook.
- ☐ Fridge stayed at 40 degrees or below the whole time: the food in it is fine.
- ☐ Anything perishable that sat above 40 degrees for 2 hours or more: throw it out.
- ☐ Let the fridge and freezer settle back to 40 and 0 degrees before you restock.
- ☐ Refill any water jugs you used, and refreeze them for next time.
- ☐ Still not sure about something? When in doubt, throw it out.

✓ Work the list in order

Each step sets up the next one. Read the thermometers first, and the rest of this checklist practically fills itself in.

Step 1: read the thermometers before you touch anything

Before you open a single container or start putting food back, look at the numbers.

The moment the power comes back, it's tempting to assume everything is fine and start restocking. Hold off for just a minute. The rest of this checklist depends on what the thermometers say, not on how the food looks or feels.

Check the fridge thermometer and the freezer thermometer before you open anything else. If you don't have one in each yet, this is the moment that convinces most people to add them — an appliance thermometer for the fridge, a freezer thermometer for the freezer, left in place from here on.

! The number tells the truth, not your hand

Food can feel cool to the touch and still be above 40 degrees. Read the thermometer before you decide anything is safe.

Step 2: check the freezer first

The freezer is the tougher of the two, and it's usually the one with the better news.

If the food in your freezer still has ice crystals, or the freezer thermometer reads 40 degrees or below, that food is safe to refreeze or cook. The texture and quality of some items may change a little, but it is safe.

A full freezer is far more likely to have come through in good shape than a half-empty one, since all that frozen food helped hold the cold together. Check a few packages from different spots, not just the ones on top.

✓ Ice crystals are the clearest signal

Visible ice crystals on a package, or a freezer thermometer at 40 degrees or below, means that food is safe to refreeze or cook.

Step 3: check the fridge next

The fridge is simpler than the freezer: one number settles most of it.

If your fridge thermometer shows it held at 40 degrees or below the entire time, the food inside is fine. There's no need to sort through it item by item.

If the reading is above 40 degrees, or you simply don't know how warm it got, don't guess. Move on to the 2-hour rule in the next step, and use it to sort what stays from what goes.

★ Not sure what the reading means?

If you're staring at a number and aren't sure what it tells you, call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll help you read it.

Step 4: apply the 2-hour rule

This is the rule that decides what stays and what goes, and it applies to one group of foods in particular.

Any perishable food — meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk, soft cheese, cut fruit or vegetables, cooked leftovers — that has sat above 40 degrees for 2 hours or more should be thrown out. Not tasted, not sniffed, not 'probably fine.' Thrown out.

The clock is about time spent above 40 degrees, not time since the power went out in the first place. A fridge that stayed closed and cool for most of the outage may not have crossed that line at all.

! When you can't tell, treat it as unsafe

If you truly don't know how long something sat above 40 degrees, don't gamble on it. When in doubt, throw it out.

Step 5: work the toss list

A quick pass through the fridge for the fragile items closes out most of the sorting.

- ☐ Raw or cooked meat, poultry, and fish or seafood.
- ☐ Milk, soft cheeses, and other dairy that was above 40 degrees for 2 hours or more.
- ☐ Eggs, if they were above 40 degrees for 2 hours or more.
- ☐ Cut fruit or vegetables that sat warm.
- ☐ Cooked leftovers that sat warm.
- ☐ Anything you simply can't account for the time on.

! There's a whole guide just on this

I've written a separate guide that walks through the full toss-or-keep list item by item, if you want it close at hand next time.

Step 6: work the keep list

Plenty of what's in the fridge is hardier than people expect, and doesn't need to go.

- ☐ Most condiments.
- ☐ Hard cheeses.
- ☐ Butter.
- ☐ Whole, uncut fruits and vegetables.
- ☐ Bread.
- ☐ Unopened juices.

✓ When it's not on either list

If an item doesn't clearly belong on the toss list or the keep list, treat it like a perishable and use the 2-hour rule to decide.

Step 7: give the appliances time to recover

A fridge and freezer that just went through an outage need a little time to catch up before they're ready for a full load.

Right after power returns, both appliances are working hard to pull back down to their normal targets — 40 degrees or below for the fridge, 0 degrees or below for the freezer. Piling in a week's worth of groceries before they get there just slows them down further.

Let the thermometers tell you when it's ready. Once both are back at their normal reading, restocking is easy and safe.

✓ Restock a little at a time

If you have a lot to put back, give it in a couple of smaller trips rather than one big one. It's easier on an appliance still catching up.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

Working through this checklist looks a little different depending on where you live and what you're protecting.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, outages tend to be shorter, and this checklist usually goes fast. One trip through the fridge and freezer with a thermometer in hand is often all it takes.

- A short outage often means both appliances never left their safe range, so the checklist is quick reassurance more than hard sorting.
- You likely have one fridge and maybe one freezer, so there's just one of each to check.
- A cooler with ice nearby makes the wait easier if an outage runs a little longer than expected.
- If you're ever unsure reading a thermometer or sorting an item, a quick call settles it fast.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, outages often run longer and there's usually more at stake — a big chest freezer of garden produce or meat is common. Work it in zones rather than all at once, and lean on ice crystals and the thermometer together.

- Check a large chest freezer section by section, since the top and bottom can thaw at different rates.
- If you're on a private well, check the water too — the well pump needs power, so it shares the same backup plan as the fridge.
- A second freezer in a garage or barn deserves its own check; don't assume it matched the kitchen fridge.
- A backup thermometer in every unit makes this whole checklist faster, especially out where a service call takes longer to arrive.

★ Somewhere in between?

Plenty of homes are a mix — a kitchen fridge, a garage freezer, and an outage now and then. Tell me what you're working through and I'll help you make sense of it. Call (330) 200-8042.

Step 8: refill the freeze-ahead jugs

If you used frozen water jugs to help the freezer hold its cold, this is the step people forget.

Once the freezer is back to normal and you've restocked, refill any jugs you emptied and set them back in to freeze. Leave a little room at the top of each one for the water to expand as it freezes, and stick with plastic jugs rather than glass.

It takes two minutes now, and it means the next outage starts with a fuller freezer instead of an empty one.

✓ Future you will be glad

Refilling the jugs right away, while it's fresh in your mind, beats discovering they're empty in the middle of the next outage.

Step 9: write down what you learned

This step takes two minutes and pays off the next time the power goes out.

- How long the power was actually out.
- What the thermometers read when you checked them.
- What made it through safely, and what you had to toss.
- Anything that surprised you, like a freezer that held longer or shorter than you expected.

✓ A sticky note is plenty

You don't need anything fancy. A sticky note on the fridge, or a line in a notebook, is gold the next time you're standing here wondering what to expect.

Check your medicine — different rules apply

Everything else in this checklist is about food. Medicine deserves its own moment.

The 40-degree line and the 2-hour rule in this guide are food-safety rules. They are not the right way to decide whether refrigerated medicine, like insulin, is still good.

If you keep any medicine in the fridge, call your pharmacist or doctor and tell them how long it was without power. Many medicines can tolerate some time at room temperature, but the details vary a lot from one medicine to the next, and freezing can ruin some of them too.

! Medicine questions go to your pharmacist

I can help you set up a cooler and a thermometer, but I'm not a medical professional. For whether a specific medicine is still good, please call your pharmacist or doctor.

Clean up spills and odors

A little cleanup now keeps a minor mess from becoming a bigger one.

Thawed food sometimes leaks on the way out. Wipe down shelves and drawers with warm, soapy water before you restock, paying extra attention to any spot that held raw meat or fish.

If an odor lingers after everything is cleaned and dry, an open box of baking soda left in the fridge or freezer for a few days often clears it up.

✓ Dry it well before closing the door

A quick towel-dry after cleaning helps the fridge get back to temperature faster and keeps moisture from turning into a bigger problem.

If the fridge isn't cooling right

Most fridges bounce back on their own. Once in a while, one doesn't, and that's worth catching early.

If you've given it a fair amount of time and the thermometer still won't settle near 40 degrees, don't restock it. Loading a struggling fridge with groceries just means losing that food too.

A unit that can't get back to a safe temperature on its own may need a service call. That's a separate problem from the outage itself, and it's better to catch it now than to find out later that nothing in it stayed cold.

★ Talk it through before you decide

If you're not sure whether your fridge is behaving normally, call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll help you think it through.

Common mistakes people make

A handful of avoidable slip-ups explain most of the trouble that follows an outage.

- **Assuming 'the power's back' means 'the food's fine'** without ever checking a thermometer.
- **Tasting food to test it** — please don't. You can't taste the germs that make you sick.
- **Restocking into a still-warm fridge**, which only slows it down and risks the new food too.
- **Skipping the second freezer** in the garage or basement because the kitchen fridge looked fine.
- **Ignoring the medicine question** and assuming it follows the same rules as food.

! The costliest mistake is the confident guess

Almost every problem I hear about starts with someone feeling sure something was 'probably okay.' This checklist exists so you never have to rely on a hopeful guess.

The big question, item by item

Don't treat the whole fridge as one verdict. Treat each item on its own.

A fridge full of food after an outage is rarely all safe or all unsafe. Some items will clearly pass, some will clearly fail, and a few will leave you unsure.

For that last group, the answer is always the same. When you're unsure about any single item, throw that one out. You don't have to be unsure about the whole fridge to make that call, and you don't have to be right about everything else to be right about that one.

! One at a time is the right way

When in doubt, throw it out — one item at a time, without letting one doubtful package cast doubt on everything else in the fridge.

Reset for next time

The last real step is getting your supplies ready for the next outage, whenever it comes.

- ❑ Restock your cooler kit, including a working thermometer.
- ❑ Refill any ice trays or ice-maker bins you emptied.
- ❑ Make sure your freeze-ahead jugs are back in the freezer.
- ❑ Put a fresh battery in any stand-alone thermometer if it needs one.
- ❑ Keep this checklist somewhere you'll actually find it — a kitchen drawer or taped inside a cabinet door.

✓ Ready beats rushed

A few minutes spent resetting now is a lot calmer than scrambling for a cooler or a thermometer during the next outage.

A note for family helping from afar

If you're checking in on a parent's house after an outage from a distance, this checklist works well over the phone.

Keep the call simple. Ask them to read you the fridge thermometer, then the freezer thermometer. From those two numbers alone, you can walk them through most of this checklist together.

Ask one question at a time, and give them time to answer. The goal is a calm conversation, not a long checklist read aloud all at once.

★ Happy to be the second call

If you'd like a second opinion after you've talked with your parent, call or text me at (330) 200-8042. I'm glad to help from either end of the phone.

Print this page and keep it by the fridge

Here is the whole checklist in one place — stick it on the fridge so it's ready before you need it.

- ☐ Power's back? Read both thermometers before anything else.
- ☐ Freezer has ice crystals or reads 40 degrees or below: safe to refreeze or cook.
- ☐ Fridge stayed at 40 degrees or below the whole time: the food is fine.
- ☐ Anything perishable above 40 degrees for 2 hours or more: throw it out.
- ☐ Let both appliances settle back to 40 and 0 degrees before you restock.
- ☐ Refill and refreeze any water jugs you used.
- ☐ Any doubt about any one item: throw it out.

★ Keep my number nearby too

Tape my number right next to this checklist: (330) 200-8042. If you're ever unsure, a quick call costs you nothing.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most often right after the power comes back on.

Q: The power's back on — is my food automatically safe?

No. Power coming back doesn't erase the time the food spent warm. Read both thermometers first, then use the 2-hour rule on anything that got above 40 degrees.

Q: What should I check first?

Both thermometers, before you open anything else. The fridge and freezer readings tell you almost everything you need to know for the rest of the checklist.

Q: My freezer still looks frozen — is it safe?

If it still has ice crystals, or the freezer thermometer reads 40 degrees or below, it's safe to refreeze or cook, though the texture of some foods may change a little.

Q: Can I restock right away?

Give it a little time first. Let the thermometer show it's back to 40 degrees or below before you load it up, so it doesn't have to catch up while working under a full load.

Q: What about my medicine?

Don't use the food rules for it. Call your pharmacist or doctor and tell them how long it was without power — they know your specific medicine.

★ Still have a question?

Working through the after-the-outage checklist is one of the calls I get most, and I'm always glad to talk it through. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made running the after-the-outage checklist feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

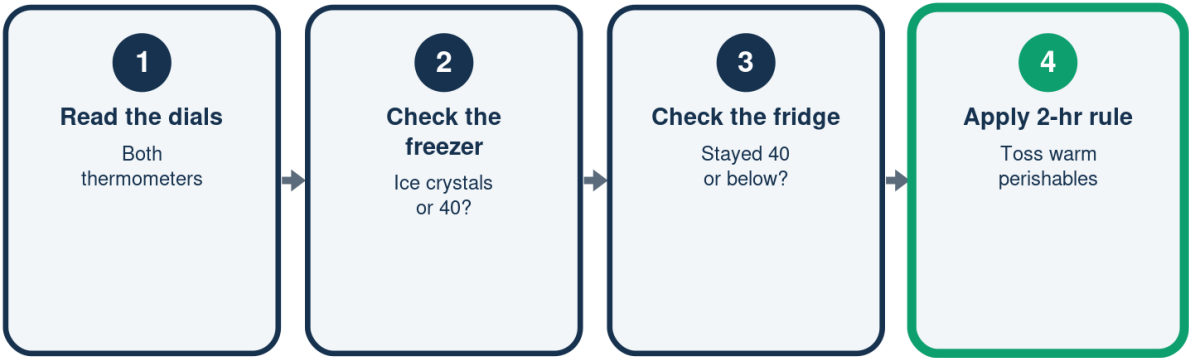
When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do the licensed electrical or gas work myself — for that I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

First Four Steps When Power's Back

Do them in order



Power on is the start of the checklist, not the end.

Freezer vs Fridge Check

Two boxes, two checks

	Safe If	Toss If
Freezer	Crystals or 40	--
Refrigerator	Stayed 40 or below	--
Either	--	Above 40, 2+ hrs
Any doubt	--	Throw it out

Read the number; then decide.

Is This Item Safe Now?

Check each questionable item

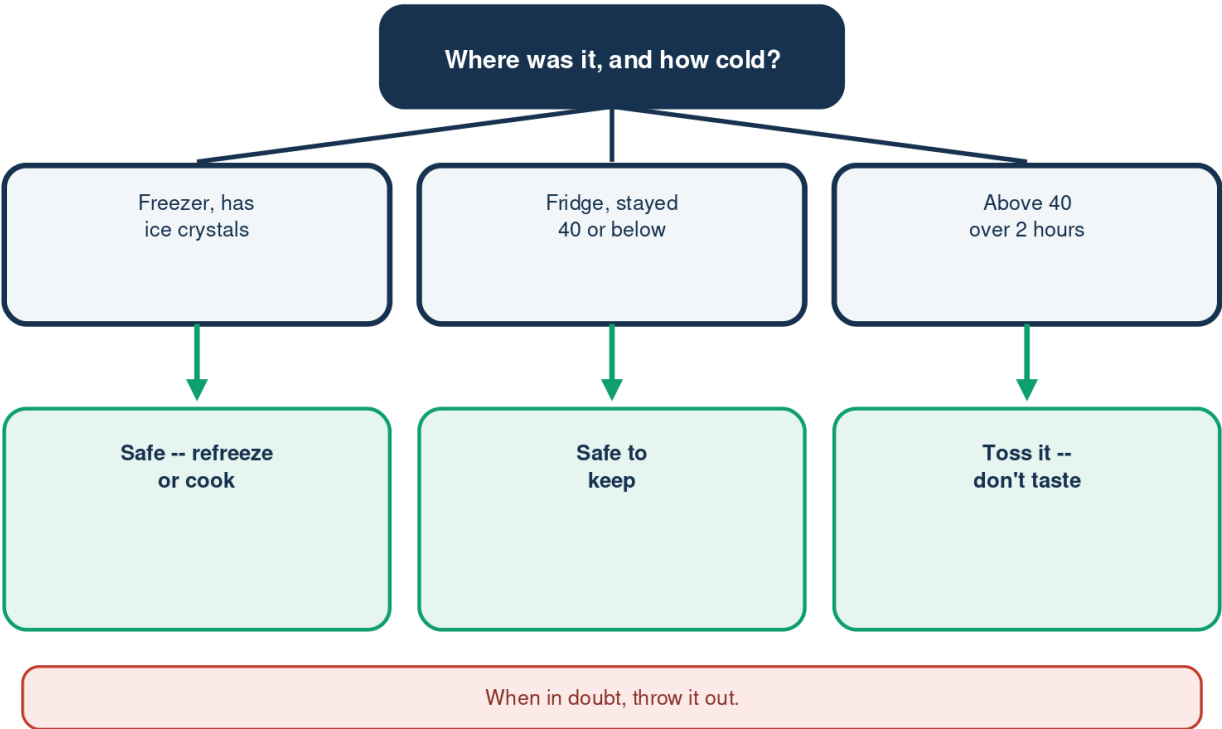


Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Keep vs Toss Recap

The quick sort

	Keep	Toss
Freezer w/ crystals	Yes	--
Fridge stayed cold	Yes	--
Warm perishables	--	Yes
Hardy items	Yes	--

A tossed meal is a small loss; food poisoning is not.



Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.
You just have to remember you can call.
Friendly, in-home tech help -- I come to you.

BILL'S PROMISE

If you are not 100% happy with a visit, I will
make it right -- or refund it. No awkwardness,
no fine print. That is how I would want to be treated.

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

Bill@BillsHomeTech.com · Mon–Sat 9:00 AM – 7:30 PM

— Bill

Prefer help without a visit?

Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



Book a visit —
billshometech.com/book

Use of these guides is subject to our Terms of Use (billshometech.com/terms-of-use).

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

Bill@BillsHomeTech.com · Mon–Sat 9:00 AM – 7:30 PM

For general information only — not professional advice. Use at your own risk. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech