Safe water, food and medicine after wildfires

The safety of water and food as well as medications are at the top of the priority list for families affected by natural disasters such as wildfires.

• The general rule of thumb when it comes to food safety and wildfire is if there is any doubt, throw it out.
• Any food and beverages exposed to heat, smoke or soot should be discarded.
• Commercially bottled water is the safest and most reliable option and has an indefinite shelf life.
• Water believed to be contaminated should not be used for drinking, making ice, preparing food or baby formula, bathing, washing hands, brushing teeth or cleaning dishes.
• Fresh food, any open containers and stored raw foods such as potatoes and onions should be discarded if they came in contact with fumes, water or chemicals.
• Throw out exposed staples such as flour, sugar, spices, seasonings and extracts as well as items stored in containers with peel-off tops, cardboard boxes or wrapped in foil, plastic, cellophane or cloth.
• Dispose of dented, bulging, rusted or charred canned goods, or canned items exposed to extreme heat.
• Since refrigerators and freezers may not have remained airtight, if a food item smells bad or tastes odd after it is cooked, throw it away.
• Frozen foods that still have ice crystals might be salvageable, but thawed items should not be refrozen.
• In the event of a power outage, discard all meats, seafood, milk, soft cheeses, eggs, prepared foods and cookie dough that spend more than two hours at a temperature above 40F.
• Because heat can affect the potency of some medications, any medicines exposed to heat, smoke and soot should be thrown away or a medical professional should be consulted before using potentially compromised prescription or over-the-counter medications.
• For more information about food safety after a wildfire, contact the nearest county Extension office. To find the nearest office, go to: oces.okstate.edu