

It's beautiful out there, isn't it? My snow drifts are sparkling, the snow man is huge and hilarious and my birch trees are bent over from the weight of the frozen snow, creating elegant arches all around my yard. In fact, it is so white out there, that I have been reminded of Dr. Zhivago.

Whenever I watch movies, I find myself thinking of stuff I know I am not supposed to be considering but I can't help it if the scene does not seem plausible. Before the big snow scene in the movie, Omar Sharif, as Yuri, had been traveling and stops by Lara's apartment hoping for news of his family. Lara, played by Julie Christie, offers a couple potatoes for sustenance.

Later, the couple is reunited and escape for safety sake to an abandoned mansion out in the middle of the white wilderness. When they enter, the inside has just as much snow and ice as the outside. It is a mesmerizing scene, with Yuri smiling at the ice crystals on the window and, reaching up with his finger to the pane, foreshadows writing the famous "Lara" poems.

I have no idea what they used for fuel to keep warm and I ask you, what did they eat during their stay at this frozen retreat? I do not know. The movie did not show even a couple potatoes! Now, about thirty five years later, that distraction served a purpose: it helped me to think of the people who worked during our most recent storm and I wondered, once again, what did they eat?

As usual, I was amazed at the efficacy and ability for our highway, police and fire departments to rise to the challenge of responding to the ordinary, the extreme, the unforeseen and the emergency. Live wires were down and had to be watched, tying up valuable resources, while roads were being plowed, car accidents happened and people needed to be taken to the hospital. When glitches were discovered, such as generators not working, people regretted that they hadn't practiced the foreseeable consequences of power outages.

As crews worked through the night and into the next day, food became a much needed resource but was difficult to secure. In towns experiencing widespread power outages for more than a few hours, food establishments large and small discovered whether or not they were prepared to be open and to provide food in a safe manner. For some, it meant doing things a little differently. For many food establishments, this last storm was so severe and the power outages so long-lasting that they remained closed or sold only food that did not require refrigeration.

As I called around to hear their stories, it was interesting for me to learn just how different each situation was and what a range of possibilities there were between completely closed and open as usual. I was pleased with the sense that everyone seemed to understand the importance of making sure that food was safe to serve. Some people were willing to move their

food around but needed a large amount of space for storing frozen and refrigerated food, such as the temporary use of refrigerated trucks, aka “reefer trucks”. Others kept the food in place and used dry ice. In those cases, they kept the chests closed, away from the public’s hands.

Some small businesses were able to bring in insulated coolers and were fortunate to have a cold room, such as a utility room, that ordinarily would not be used for storing food but in this situation, with food being contained in coolers, it was acceptable as a temporary solution. With some extra help for moving the food supply back and forth from coolers to kitchen, they were able to stay open and have a successful day. Not only did they succeed in staying open, they provided a valuable resource to all the workers who needed to stay out there in the storm.

In addition to practicing food safety in a challenging situation, they also needed to practice many "old school" methods of business. Without a generator to run the registers, they had to find paper and pencil and they quickly discovered who remembers how to add the old-fashioned way.

Areas dependent on wells for their water supply during a power outage are even more challenged for preparing and serving food in a safe manner. With the well pump out of commission, people cannot flush the toilets. I'll leave it to your imagination to picture just how quickly it can become nearly impossible to have clean hands and surfaces when leaving the bathroom and before entering the kitchen. This scenario applies both to homes and to food establishments dependent on well water. In the winter the snow can provide the water needed for flushing the toilet if you can find a way to melt it, such as in pots on your outdoor gas grill. About a gallon of water quickly poured into the toilet, will allow the water to flush by gravity.

Water is also needed for successful hand washing. Even if you can find some extra water for that, just the act of having to pick up the container of water in order to rinse your hands makes it difficult to not leave germs behind on that container. It's useful to have antibacterial wipes for hands and surfaces in this particular situation.

I can't help but wonder about all the stories I've heard of people being sick with a "stomach bug" since that snowstorm. Also be on the lookout for conjunctivitis in these situations, as it easily develops, along with diarrhea and vomiting, as a result of contamination from the hands.

Well, those images certainly ruin the romance of that snow scene in Dr. Zhivago! I guess the director decided to leave those details out as well. But in real life, details happen.

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