



Water Service Interruption and Response to Boil Water Advisory

Public Health Information Brief

Updated August 2022



Background and Summary

If a food establishment has water service interrupted due to a boil water advisory, contamination to the water supply, or any damage to the water supply lines, certain procedures should be followed while the water supply is not available and after restoration of the water supply.

The following guidelines are intended to assist with the development of temporary alternative procedures to address various food operations that are affected by the disruption of the water supply. It is important that the manager or person-in-charge (PIC) ensures that if these temporary procedures are needed, they are strictly followed and all operations operate in compliance with food safety requirements and the directive of local regulatory authorities.

Response to Boil Water Advisory or Contaminated Water Supply

Upon notification of a water interruption, the following actions should be taken:

- Shut off water at water main, if possible.
- Turn off water lines to ice machines, soda and water towers, as well as any coffee/tea machines, sprays, misters, etc.
- If possible, determine the potential length of the water interruption. If the duration is unknown or will be for an extended time, an appropriate party (management, QA, risk management, etc.) should work with the health department to make a decision regarding whether the establishment should be open without running water.
- If the regulatory authority requires food operations to cease – close operations and discard any products that may have been prepared with contaminated water.
- Await further instructions for cleaning and sanitizing foodservice operations as the contaminated water cannot be used for these tasks.
- Be ready to implement a pre-established plan to operate using single service utensils, bottled water, commercially manufactured ice, etc. This may assist in getting health department approval to operate.
- If required to close, post a notice sign on front door of establishment indicating a temporary closure due to water supply interruption.

The following table contains action steps and alternate procedures for various food service operations that may be affected by a water supply interruption IF the health department or regulatory authority allows any foodservice operations to remain open. Otherwise, cease operations as directed by the health department or regulatory authority.

If these procedures cannot be followed to provide safe water and food safety practices, every consideration should be made to cease operations until safe, potable water supply becomes available.

| OPERATION | ALTERNATE PROCEDURES |
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| Hand washing (Hand wash sinks and in restrooms) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use heated bottled water, boiled water (if approved by the health department), or water brought in from a safe public water supply. <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disable water supplies at sinks and post warning signs if water is not safe for drinking, bathing, or washing. • Do not permit bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods. • Supply heated bottled water in restrooms for hand washing. • Use tap water and germicidal hand soap to wash hands properly, followed by a hand sanitizer. (This option should be offered to guests in restrooms). |
| Drinking water | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ONLY use commercially bottled water and/or water that has been boiled for a minimum of 1 minute, depending on the nature of the contamination. <i>Note: this solution cannot be employed for some types of contamination, including toxic chemicals. Do not use boiled water if chemical contamination is suspected.</i> <p>AND/OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring in water from a safe public water supply in covered, sanitized containers. (Preferred option) <p>AND/OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire a licensed drinking water tanker truck. |
| Beverages made with water | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop using post-mix beverage machines, auto-fill coffee makers, instant hot water machines (BUNN), and reconstituted juice or tea machines. • Use bottled water, and use canned/bottled soft drinks or retail containers of soft drinks. |
| Ice making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discard any existing ice. • Discontinue making ice. • Use commercially manufactured ice for cooling foods or in drinks. <p>AND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a safe water supply is restored, clean, sanitize and rinse any ice bins and machines according to manufacturer's recommendations or specific ice machine sanitation instructions in the "Recovering following operational closure" section. |

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| OPERATION | ALTERNATE PROCEDURES |
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| Serve only prepackaged, pre-made foods, <u>IF</u> permitted to operate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limit menu to only foods that have been pre-packaged and manufactured in commercial food processing facility. Use single service utensils and paper products, bottled water, and canned sodas. |
| Preparing foods that require water | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DISCONTINUE operations in the event of chemical contamination. <p>In the case of other water service interruptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discard any ready-to-eat foods prepared with water prior to the knowledge of the water contamination/potential for contamination, including produce washed with contaminated water. Prepare/hydrate any ready-to-eat foods using commercially bottled or boiled water (if advised as safe) or safe water from a commercial drinking water tanker truck. |
| Thawing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DISCONTINUE in the event of chemical contamination. <p>In the case of other water service interruptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thaw frozen foods only in the refrigerator or as part of the cooking process. Do not thaw in tap water. |
| Cooking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DISCONTINUE in the event of chemical contamination. <p>In the case of other water service interruptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use commercially bottled water <p>AND/OR ONE OF THESE OPTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use water that has been boiled for 1 minute if so directed by the health department Bring in water from a safe public water supply in covered, sanitized containers. Hire a licensed drinking water tanker truck. |
| Washing/Soaking produce | <p>DISCONTINUE in the event of chemical contamination.</p> <p>In the case of other water service interruptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use pre-washed, packaged produce. Use frozen/canned fruits and vegetables. <p>AND/OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wash fresh produce with boiled (if so advised), commercially bottled water, or safe water from a public water supply system. |
| Spray misting units | <p>SPECIFIC TO GROCERY STORES: If spray misters are used to spray produce, seafood or meat cases, DISCONTINUE USE.</p> |

| OPERATION | ALTERNATE PROCEDURES |
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| Cleaning and sanitizing equipment, utensils, and tableware | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use single service utensils and tableware. <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DISCONTINUE use of dish machine and 3-compartment sink in the event of chemical contamination. <p>In the case of other water service interruptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the existing automatic dish machine or the 3-compartment sink. Make certain that the sanitization step is being properly conducted – sanitizer concentration and temperature. • Use bottled water or boiled water for sanitizer buckets/spray bottles and check sanitizer concentration to make certain that the sanitizer concentration is correct. |

Recovery Following an Operation Closure

The following is a re-opening checklist to be used once the authorization and notification that the water supply is safe has been given. This list is a generic list and does not supersede any instruction given by local regulatory authorities. Always follow any directions given by the local water utility on using water lines after the ban is lifted. The flush times or procedures may be different from those in the bullets below.

- Follow any directions given by the water utility or flush all pipes and faucets for a minimum of 5 minutes.
- Flush, clean, and sanitize any waterline connections for ice machines, post-mix beverage machines, spray misters, coffee or tea makers, dishwashers, and any other equipment that has water connections.
- Run water softeners through a complete regeneration cycle.
- Change all water filters on equipment once the lines have been flushed.
- Drain any reservoirs in tall buildings.
- Flush beverage machine lines for a minimum of 5 minutes.
- Drinking fountains should be flushed for at least 5 minutes continuously.
- Specific ice machine sanitation:
 - Flush the water lines to the machine inlet.
 - Close valve on water line and disconnect the water line from the inlet.
 - Open the valve, and run 5 gallons of potable water through the valve. Dispose of the water; do not reuse.
 - Close valve.
 - Reconnect water line to inlet.
 - Open the valve. Flush the water lines in the machine.
 - Turn on ice machine.
 - Dispose of the first three batches of ice.
 - Clean and sanitize all parts and surfaces that come in contact with water and ice following manufacturer's instructions.

Instructions from Local Health Authority

The local health authority will always have the best, most immediate information available in any affected locale. Instructions of the local health authority should always supersede any information provided in this document.

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Steritech Resources

Steritech can assist you with crisis management planning or water service interruption, as well as any questions you may have about food safety following severe weather event. Steritech's Customer Care Center is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 800.868.0089 to assist you with any of your needs.

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