TCEQ GENERAL INFORMATION
Water Supply Division
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After a Disaster: Is Your Drinking Water Safe?

If you are affected by a hurricane, flood, tornado, fire, or other disaster, use this information to understand your options for ensuring that your family has clean drinking water.

Questions? Please contact your TCEQ regional office. Find contact information for the regional office that serves you at <www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/region>.

Can I drink the water?

You should not drink the water if you are unsure if it is safe. If you have a private well, you should disinfect it before you use it. You can find guidance for disinfecting your well at <www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/safewell>. If you receive water from a public water system, you should not use the water until you have been informed that the water is safe.

What is a "boil water" notice?

Public water systems issue "boil water" notices to let you know when the drinking water is not safe. The notification may be aired on radio and TV, published in newspapers, or, for smaller systems, posted in a conspicuous location. If you don't know if a "boil water" notice is in effect for your area, contact your public water system directly.

How long do I boil the water when under a "boil water" notice?

Water passes through several stages of near-boiling as its temperature rises. The water is simmering when the surface appears to move gently on its own, stirred by the natural rise of heated water. A gentle boil has been reached when there is a steady stream of bubbles that disturbs the water's surface.

When a vigorous rolling boil has been reached, the water's boil is rolling so aggressively that it cannot be disturbed or disrupted by stirring. You will need to bring the water to a vigorous rolling boil and then boil for at least two minutes. You can consume the water after it cools down.

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How will I know when the "boil water" notice is over?

The public water system will issue a "rescind" notice in the same way they issued the initial notification. If you don't know if a "boil water" notice is still in effect for your public water system, contact them directly.

Who is my public water system provider?

If you don't know who your water system provider is, and you need to contact them, you may look at an old water bill for the name and phone number. If you know the name of your provider, you can find their contact information in the TCEQ's Integrated Water Utility Database, <tceq.texas.gov/utilities/iwud.html>, or Drinking Water Watch, <dww.tceq.texas.gov/DWW/>. You may also contact the TCEQ Water Supply Division at 512-239-4691.

If I can't contact my public water system, what should I do?

If you are unable to contact your public water system, contact your county or city emergency management office. Or you can contact your TCEQ regional office. Find information about the regional office that serves your county at <www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/region>.

You can also call TCEQ's Consumer Assistance at 512-239-6100 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday or if it is after-hours or on the weekend, call 888-777-3186.

How does our public water system know if the water is safe to drink?

Many contaminants can affect the safety of drinking water. The most common concern after flooding or power outage events is bacteriological contamination. System pressures must first be addressed. The water provider should take coliform samples representative of the distribution system once pressure has been restored to at least 20 psi.

If bacteria are present, disinfectant must be applied to control pathogens, the organisms that can cause illness. After ensuring that adequate pressure and chlorine levels have been restored, and after bacteriological monitoring shows the water is free of contamination, the "boil water notice" may be lifted and you may cease boiling water before using it.

When can I expect my water to be safe to drink again?

In some cases it may take some time for power to be restored and the water system to be fully repaired and disinfected. You should continue to boil water until notified by your utility.

How can the TCEQ help my public water system?

Your public water system may obtain assistance from the Public Drinking Water Section at 512-239-4691 during working hours, 888-777-3186 during non-working hours, and through e-mail to <pdws@tceq.texas.gov>.

Do I have to pay my water bill if I am out of water?

Your bill may be prorated. You should contact your utility for its billing policy.

When can a utility cut service off?

A utility may cut service for nonpayment of bills or for an imminent health hazard.

The water system is down. Can I use water from my neighbor's private well?

Generally, no, but if you do, you should bring the water to a vigorous rolling boil, then boil it for two minutes and cool it before using. See "How long do I boil the water" above.

Is it safe to use my on-site septic system?

Septic systems frequently malfunction during heavy rain or flooding events. We do not recommend using a malfunctioning septic system. Usually, this is a short-lived problem that does not require any action by a licensed installer or maintenance provider.

If the unit fails to work properly after waters recede, you may contact your local authorized agent (usually the county or city) or the TCEQ regional office for assistance in locating licensed personnel and obtaining the necessary permits for any needed repair.

If you do not know who the designated representative is, contact the TCEQ regional office that serves your county or our On-Site Septic Facility Program Support Section Staff at 512-239-6300.