



TCEQ GENERAL INFORMATION

Water Supply Division

GI-431 • Revised March 2020

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. A TCEQ regional directory is available at www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/region.

Can I drink the water?

You should not drink the water if you are unsure whether it is safe or not.

- If you have a private well, you should disinfect it before you use it. You can find guidance for disinfecting your well in *Disinfecting Your Private Well* < www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/gi-432 >.
- If you receive water from a public water system, ensure the water is safe to drink before using. Contact your public water system for current information.

What is a boil water notice?

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

How long do I boil the water when my public water system is 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. Under a boil water notice, you will need to bring the water to a vigorous rolling boil and then boil it for at least two minutes. You can consume the water after it cools down.

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

The public water system will issue a “rescind” notice cancelling the boil water notice. If you don’t know whether or not a boil water notice is still in effect for your public water system, contact the public water system.

Who is my public water system?

If you don’t know who your water provider is, look at an old water bill for the provider’s name and phone number. If you know the name of your provider but not its telephone number, you can find its contact information in the TCEQ’s Texas Drinking Water Watch database at <dww2.tceq.texas.gov/DWW/>. You may also contact the TCEQ Water Supply Division at 512-239-4691 and ask for help identifying your provider and obtaining its contact information.

If I can’t reach my public water system, what can I do?

If you are unable to reach your public water system, contact your county or city emergency management office for assistance.

You can contact your TCEQ regional office. A regional directory is available at <www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/region>.

You can also call TCEQ’s Water Supply Division at 512-239-4691 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. If it is after working hours or on the weekend, call 888-777-3186, or send an e-mail to <pdws@tceq.texas.gov>.

How does my 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 and disinfectant residual must first be addressed. Once pressure has been restored to at least 20 psi (pounds per square inch), the distribution has been adequately flushed, and the disinfectant residual is at or above the minimum regulatory requirements, the public water system should take coliform samples at locations representative of the distribution system.
- If the coliform samples show that bacteria are present, the public water system must apply disinfectant to control pathogens, the organisms that can cause illness.

After ensuring that adequate pressure and disinfectant levels have been restored, and after bacteriological monitoring shows the water is free of contamination, the public water system can rescind the boil water notice and you can stop 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 your public water system rescinds its boil water notice.

Can the TCEQ help my public water system?

Your public water system may seek assistance from the TCEQ's Water Supply Division at 512-239-4691 during working hours, 888-777-3186 during non-working hours, and through e-mail sent to <pdws@tceq.texas.gov>.

Do I have to pay my water bill if the public water system is not operating?

These policies are decided by your public water system. You should contact your public water system for its billing policy.

My public water system is not in service. Can I use water from my neighbor's private well?

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. Please be aware that your neighbor's private well may have also been impacted by the disaster that shut down your public water system.

Can I use my on-site septic system?

Septic systems frequently malfunction during heavy rain or flooding events. Using a malfunctioning septic system is not recommended. Generally, this is a short-lived problem that does not require any action by a licensed installer or maintenance provider if the septic system is given some time to recover.

If the unit fails to work properly after waters recede, 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 authorized agent is, contact the TCEQ regional office that serves your county or our On-Site Septic Facility Program Support Section Staff at 512-239-3799.