

Emergency Water Disruption Guidance

FOR FOOD ESTABLISHMENT OPERATORS

Understanding Emergency Water Issues

Emergency water disruptions can arise from various issues, including:

- **Coliform Bacteria Contamination:** Indicates the possible presence of pathogens due to a compromised water system.
- **System Pressure Loss:** Allows backflow, increasing the risk of contamination from nearby sources.
- **Water Service Loss:** Water system to facility has no/low pressure, meaning hygienic operations cannot be maintained within the facility.

Water systems must maintain adequate pressure and be free from microbial contaminants to be considered safe for use.

Difference Between a Notice and an Advisory

It's crucial to understand the difference between a Boil Water Advisory and a Boil Water Notice:

- **Boil Water Advisory (BWA):** Issued as a **precaution** due to potential contamination; establishments may continue limited operations following safety measures. **Boiling water before use is mandatory.**
- **Boil Water Notice:** Issued when contamination is **confirmed**; higher risk, typically requiring **immediate suspension** of operations involving water use until the notice has been lifted and establishment is cleared.

Potable Water Requirements for Operation

Food establishments must have a sufficient supply of potable (safe for human consumption) water to meet operational needs. This includes water for:

- **Handwashing:** Employees must have access to hot and cold potable water for frequent handwashing.
- **Food Preparation:** Water used for washing, rinsing, and cooking food must be potable.
- **Warewashing:** Dishwashers and other warewashing equipment require a constant supply of potable water.
- **Cleaning and Sanitizing:** Potable water is essential for cleaning and sanitizing surfaces and equipment.

Immediate Suspension of Operations

In certain situations, immediate suspension of operations is required to protect public health. If **minimum water requirements** cannot be met, **immediate suspension of operations** may be required under **FDA Food Code §8-404.11**. Operations must cease immediately if:

- The water source is deemed unsafe.
- There is **no potable water**.
- The establishment cannot maintain hygienic operations (e.g., no handwashing ability, improper sanitation).

Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)

An **Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)** outlines how a food establishment will respond to emergencies such as water interruptions. It must include:

- **Contact Information:** List of key personnel, local health department, water utility, and emergency services.
- **Water Source Alternatives:** Identification of alternative potable water sources (e.g., bottled water, mobile water tanks).
- **Sanitation Procedures:** Detailed procedures for maintaining hygiene and sanitation during a water disruption.
- **Communication Plan:** A plan for communicating with employees, customers, and the health department.
- **Operational Shutdown Procedures:** Step-by-step instructions for safely suspending operations if required.

As required by **FDA Food Code §8-404.11**, an establishment must implement corrective actions or cease operations during an emergency that poses a public health hazard or if Emergency Operations Plan cannot be adequately followed.

Health Department Approval for Resuming Operations

Before continuing operations during a water emergency:

- The establishment must **notify the local health department**.
- The EOP and proposed corrective actions (e.g., use of bottled water) must be reviewed and **approved**.
- Reopening without approval is a violation of FDA Food Code and can result in permit action being taken.

Steps to Reopen After a Water Emergency

The following must be met before you may reopen your food establishment after a water emergency:

- **Resolution of the water issue** (e.g., water system repaired and flushed).
- **Negative bacteriological tests** (e.g., coliform absent) confirmed by 2 negative samples collected at least 48 hours apart.
- **Flushing of all affected pipes** for several minutes once safe water is restored. This includes any equipment connected directly to a water line, such as a beverage dispenser, coffee/tea maker, ice machine, dish machine, etc.
- **Verification by health officials** that all equipment, surfaces, and utensils were sanitized with safe water and any ice/beverages or food made with potentially contaminated water have been discarded.
- Health department must provide **written approval** to reopen.

Resources

Here's a list of valuable resources to help you prepare for and respond to water emergencies:

- **[Emergency Water Plan Guidance](#)**
- **[Emergency Operations Plan Checklist](#)**
- **[Emergency Water Supply Plan Template](#)**
- **[CFP Emergency Action Plans for Retail Establishments](#)**

