

Facts About: Emergency Water Supply



HEALTH
DEPARTMENT
Prince George's County

Environmental Engineering Program
Division of Environmental Health
301-883-7681 | TTY/STS Dial 711

What To Do If Your Water Has Been Shut Off

Whenever your water supply has been shut off, water will not be available to you for your basic needs—like for cooking, drinking, bathing, brushing teeth, flushing toilets, or washing clothes. Having a readily-available supply of stored potable water is essential to meet these needs.

Amount of Water Needed

All water used for consumption, bathing or cooking must be from a safe source: 1) commercially-bottled or 2) from a public water supply. Rainwater and stream water should not be used without proper treatment as they are not considered safe.

Drinking Water

A normally-active person needs to drink at least two quarts of water each day. Hot environments, intense activity, nursing mothers, children or ill persons can require double that amount. **Allow for one gallon of drinking water per person per day.**

How to Safely Store Water

You don't have to go out and buy specific water storage bottles, but **not all household food storage containers are fit for water storage**. Any container to be used for emergency water storage must be clean--washed with hot soapy water and rinsed with hot water. Storage containers for potable water must have a tight fitting lid or cap to prevent entrance of contaminants and evaporation of the stored water. The perfect water storage bottles are clean, two-liter soft drink bottles. Date each bottle so you'll know whether to disinfect it before it is used. **Do NOT use any container that was used to store gasoline or other chemicals or plastic milk containers** because they are not sturdy enough for long-term storage and are hard to clean. **Water should be stored in the refrigerator or in a clean, dry, protected area.**

Shelf-Life of Stored Water

Treated water from a public water supply is fine as-is (does not need anything added when collected) and **can be stored for up to six months** if these procedures are followed:

- 1) After two weeks of storage, treat 2-liters of water from a public water supply with two drops of household chlorine bleach 15-20 minutes prior to drinking; a 5 gallon container requires 1 teaspoon of bleach. Shake the container after the bleach has been added to distribute the bleach throughout the water.
- 2) If stored water develops an objectionable appearance, taste or odor, it may be restored by pouring the water from one clean container to another clean container (aeration) three or four times. Then the procedure in #1 above should be followed.

Emergency Water Disinfection Methods

Most water can be purified by boiling it for 1 minute in order to destroy any microorganisms present. Aeration/mixing after the water has cooled, or addition of a pinch of salt, will improve the taste of boiled water. Allow the water to cool before storing in plastic containers. Boiled water can be stored for up to a year.

Flushing Toilets / Other Conservation Methods:

- Toilets need to be flushed on a regular basis. Water to be used for flushing toilets does not need to be treated. You should store this water supply in different containers than water stored for drinking, cooking or personal hygiene. Be sure to clearly label the toilet flushing water container. Water that has been stored in a bathtub is a perfect source of water for flushing toilets. Use a bucket to pour water from the tub into the toilet which will cause the toilet to flush out its contents.
- Use collected rainwater to water indoor plants.
- Use a Laundromat to wash your laundry.
- Take showers at relatives' homes, gyms, or community centers that have showers.

For More Information

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/global/household.html>

http://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/Government/AgencyIndex/Health/community_hygiene.asp