

BOIL WATER NOTICES

Frequently Asked Questions from Food Service Establishments

Food service providers are responsible to protect their customers, employees and the public from potentially contaminated drinking water. This is not always easy and takes some thought and effort. Below are answers to questions that are commonly asked when a boil water event occurs. This information applies to restaurants, delis, schools and other institutions with food service establishments. If your business or facility runs its own public water supply then you will have additional responsibilities, information on these responsibilities is available in the Fact Sheet for Public Drinking Water Suppliers.

The information in this fact sheet is intended to help regulated facilities deal with boil water events. It does not revise or supercede any applicable regulations or permit requirements.

QUESTIONS:

- Q1 - Why was a boil water notice or order issued for my water?**
- Q2 - How long will the need to boil water continue?**
- Q3 - Must I close due to a boil Water Notice?**
- Q4 - How long do I boil my water to make it safe to drink?**
- Q5 - Can I use the beverage fountain?**
- Q6 - Can I use our coffee machine?**
- Q7 - Can I use my ice?**
- Q8 - Can I use the water to wash produce?**
- Q9 - Can I use the water to cook with?**
- Q10 - Can I use food prepared with water during the boil water order?**
- Q11 - Can I use the water to wash the floors and walls?**
- Q12 - Can my employees use the water for hand washing?**
- Q13 - What should I do about sinks and water fountains?**
- Q14 - What about sinks in washrooms?**
- Q15 - Can I use hand sanitizing lotion or wipes?**
- Q16 - Is potentially contaminated water safe for washing dishes?**
- Q17 - What must I do when the need to boil water is over?**

ANSWERS:

- Q1 - Why was a boil water notice or order issued for my water?**

A boil water notice or order is issued by water utilities or health agencies respectively as a precaution to protect consumers from drinking water that may have been contaminated with disease causing organisms (also called pathogens). Boil water notices and orders are typically issued when an unexpected condition has caused a potential for biological contamination of

BOIL WATER NOTICES

Frequently Asked Questions from Food Service Establishments

water in a public water system. Common reasons for a boil water notice or order include loss of pressure in the distribution system, loss of disinfection, and other unexpected water quality problems. These often result from other events such as water line breaks, treatment disruptions, power outages and floods.

The reason for your boil water notice or order should be included in the notification. Your water utility and your local Health Department office can also answer questions you may have about why a boil water notice was issued for your water supply, and what to do.

Q2 - How long will the need to boil water continue?

Public notification will be given when a boil water notice or order is lifted. Typically the need to boil water lasts for 24 to 48 hours, but can be longer and may last for several days or more. How long will depend on the conditions that caused the need to boil, how quickly the conditions are corrected, and how long it takes for laboratory results to confirm it is safe to return to normal water use. Your water utility and/or local Health Department can update you on the progress of corrective actions and how long the event is expected to last.

Q3 - Must I close due to a boil water notice or order?

If the water supply serving a food service establishment becomes contaminated, the safest response is to close. However, this may not always be practical. Unless the Health Department directs otherwise, you may remain open as long as you can fully protect all your customers and staff from exposure to the water.

If you stay open, it is your responsibility to take whatever steps are needed to protect your customers. In addition to boiling water or using alternate water sources** you may need to:

- Remove menu items that are difficult to prepare with limited water
- Add menu items that require little or no water for preparation
- Change food sources, switch to pre-washed produce, canned vegetables, and bottled drinks
- Discard all ice present in the building and turn off the ice machine
- Use single-service tableware
- Discontinue use of post-mix beverage equipment
- Make sure all staff, on all shifts, understand and implement all needed protective measures

Q4 – How long do I boil my water so that it is safe to drink?

Bring water to a **FULL ROLLING BOIL** for **1 MINUTE** and **COOL BEFORE USE**.

Because water may take 20 to 30 minutes to cool, plan ahead. When possible, prepare boiled water in advance so you will not need to use it when hot and risk scalds or burns.

BOIL WATER NOTICES

Frequently Asked Questions from Food Service Establishments

Q5 - Can I use the beverage fountain?

Fountains with pre-mixed soda canisters (pre-mix fountains) may be used, but pre-mix fountains that also serve water or ice should have these options turned off, emptied and drained. Do not use soda fountains that are connected to your water source and mix tap water with syrup from the canisters (post-mix fountains). Post-mix fountains must be turned off, disconnected and drained. An easy replacement for post-mix fountains is to use canned or bottled beverages. To make sure that all staff know which equipment should not be used, place signs on soda machines, soda guns and juice guns that say "Do Not Use".

Post-mix fountains and the water and ice features of pre-mix fountains should not be reconnected until after the boil water order/notice has been lifted and the machine and water lines have been flushed and disinfected per the manufacturer's directions.

If there is ice in any of your soda machines, see the questions and answers regarding ice and ice machines.

Q6 - Can I use our coffee machine?

You can keep using any coffee machine that you fill with pre-boiled or bottled water. Coffee machines that are connected to your water lines should not be used unless they heat the water to at least 190°F (degrees Fahrenheit) and brew the coffee at this temperature.

Q7 - Can I use my ice or my ice machine?

Ice from your ice maker may be used **ONLY IF** it can be positively confirmed that it was made well in advance of the boil water notice. Ice made since the boil water notice was issued, ice of uncertain age, and any ice mixed with questionable ice must not be used. Bagged or packaged ice made from a potable water source that is not under a boil water notice may be used instead.

Discard all ice that may be questionable. Empty and unplug your ice machine and place a "Do Not Use" sign on it. Do not restart the ice machine until the boil water event has ended and the lines and machine have been properly flushed and disinfected per the manufacturer's directions. The entire ice bin and scoops or containers used for ice must be disinfected prior to using.

Q8 - Can I use the water to wash produce?

Produce and other food items that will not be thoroughly cooked must be washed using water that has been boiled and then cooled. Bottled water or water from an acceptable alternate source** can be also used.

Q9 - Can I use the water to cook with?

Water used for food preparation or cooking needs to be boiled first or bottled water; unless the food will be boiled during cooking, like when making soup or boiling pasta.

BOIL WATER NOTICES

Frequently Asked Questions from Food Service Establishments

Q10 - Can I use food prepared with water during the boil water order?

Unless the food was boiled as part of the cooking process; any food that was prepared or washed with potentially contaminated water should be discarded.

Q11 - Can I use the water to wash the floors and walls?

Unboiled tap water may be used for cleaning floors, walls, and other surfaces that food does not contact unless the Health Department directs otherwise.

Q12 - Can my employees use the water for hand washing?

Employees must use soap and bottled or boiled and cooled water to wash their hands.

Antimicrobial products that do not require water for use, for example, alcohol-based hand rubs, are less effective and are not an adequate substitute for soap and water.

Q13 - What should I do about sinks and water fountains?

All water fountains and sinks accessible to the public should be shut off at their emergency shut off valve if possible. Signs that clearly state “Do Not Drink” should be posted on all water fountains and sinks.

Q14 - What about sinks in washrooms?

Soap and bottled water or boiled and completely cooled water should be provided in washrooms for washing hands. If sanitary facilities for proper hygiene cannot be provided for staff and customers, the establishment must close.

Q15 - Can my employees or customers use hand sanitizing lotion or wipes?

Sanitizing lotion and wipes may be used in addition to proper hand washing with soap and bottled or boiled and cooled water. Hand sanitizers alone are not as effective as scrubbing with water and soap and are not an acceptable substitute for hand washing by employees.

Q16 - Is potentially contaminated water safe for washing dishes?

Hand-washed dishes:

Yes, if given a final sanitizing rinse with a dilute bleach solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented regular bleach (5.25%) per gallon of water. Water used for the sanitizing rinse must be bottled, boiled and cooled, or from an acceptable alternate source**. Allow dishes, cutlery, cups, etc. to completely air dry before use. This important air drying step will ensure that parasites such as *Cryptosporidium*, which may be found in contaminated drinking water, are destroyed.

Home-style dishwasher:

BOIL WATER NOTICES

Frequently Asked Questions from Food Service Establishments

Yes, if the hot wash is at least 170° F (degrees Fahrenheit) and includes a dry cycle, or if the dishwasher is NSF listed and the sanitize cycle is utilized. Note: Not all home-style dishwashers reach 170°F or have a sanitize cycle. If you are uncertain of the effectiveness of your dishwasher, wash the dishes with your dishwasher and then use a sanitizing rinse of 1 tablespoon of unscented regular bleach (5.25%) per gallon of water. Water used for the sanitizing rinse must be bottled, boiled and cooled, or from an acceptable alternate source**. Allow dishes, cutlery, cups, etc. to completely air dry before use. This important air drying step will ensure that parasites such as *Cryptosporidium*, which may be found in contaminated drinking water, are destroyed.

Commercial dishwasher:

Yes, if it is operated with a heat sanitizing rinse set at 170°F (degrees Fahrenheit) that lasts for at least 30 seconds. If you are uncertain of the effectiveness of your dishwasher, or your dishwasher uses a chemical sanitizer, wash with your dishwasher and then use a sanitizing rinse of 1 tablespoon of unscented regular bleach (5.25%) per gallon of water. Water used for the sanitizing rinse must be bottled, boiled and cooled, or from an acceptable alternate source**. Allow dishes, cutlery, cups, etc. to completely air dry before use. This important air drying step will ensure that parasites such as *Cryptosporidium*, which may be found in contaminated drinking water, are destroyed.

Q17 - What must I do when the need to boil water is over?

All equipment must be flushed and disinfected per the manufacturer's recommendations. Water service lines, other plumbing and water holding devices such as hot water heaters, must also be flushed. Food and beverage equipment and food contact surfaces must also be cleaned and sanitized.

*** More detailed information on acceptable alternate water sources can be found in the fact sheet Basic Information For All Consumers, which is available from the New York State Department of Health or from your local health department.*

Additional equipment and processes may also be effected by a complete loss of public water or a Do Not Use Order; including but not limited to equipment that uses potable water for coolant or make up water such as backup generators, refrigerators, and heating and ventilation equipment.