



Department of Health

Bureau of Environmental Health
& Radiation Program
Food Safety Program

Potable Water Interruption in a Food Service Operation

A sufficient supply of potable water is necessary in a food service operation for handwashing, food preparation, cleaning and sanitizing equipment, and other food service activities. Problems involving the water supply (including ice) are especially important since water may serve as a direct vehicle of contamination to food or food contact surfaces.

Whether a food service operation is served by a public or private water supply, anticipated and unanticipated interruptions in the supply of potable water can occur. Anticipated interruptions include routine or scheduled maintenance on the pump or plumbing, or less commonly, the diversion of the water during certain hours each day due to rationing. Unanticipated interruptions include plumbing failure, fire department demands, supply contamination, or system failure due to accidents or natural disasters.

When Water Service is Interrupted...

In the event of an interruption of water service, the facility should promptly notify the local health department to determine the best course of action for the facility.

The local health department must decide, on a case-by-case basis, what actions are appropriate to protect the public health in the event of an interruption in the supply of potable water. Several factors should be considered when deciding the best course of action, including (but not limited to): the operation's dependency on water (e.g. menu and nature of the operation); the anticipated duration of the water interruption; advance contingency planning; and the availability of alternate supplies of potable water, single-service tableware, single-use kitchenware and other resources.

A food service operation may be authorized to remain in operation during an interruption of its supply of potable water only if appropriate actions are taken by the operator to assure the safety of food, the cleanliness of utensils and equipment, and the personal hygiene of employees.

If the facility does not have the necessary resources to safely maintain operations during an interruption of water service, it may be required to temporarily cease operations.

Temporary Supply of Potable Water

An alternative supply must be protected from contamination and must provide enough water to accommodate the operations of the food service. In addition, water haulers and water tanks used for transporting or storing potable water must be cleaned, sanitized and filled in an acceptable manner.

The facility may be able to obtain a temporary supply of potable water from:

- Individual serving size containers of commercially bottled water,
- Piping, tubing or hoses connected to an adjacent approved source, or
- Bulk water containers filled from an approved source, such as a water tank truck.

Water supply interruptions need to be examined on a case-by-case basis, with attention given to the public health implications, to decide if the temporary source of water is safe and sufficient.

Alternative Procedures

The food service operation's activities should be evaluated. The following alternative procedures may be considered and approved by the local health department:

- Thawing of frozen foods: thaw only in refrigerator or as part of the cooking process.
- Washing of produce:
 - Obtain and use prewashed packaged produce.
 - Use produce washed prior to interruption.
 - Use frozen/canned produce.
 - Wash fresh produce with potable water from an alternative approved source.
- Spraying, dipping and soaking of produce: use potable water from an alternative source.
- Preparing and cooking food, including reconstituting dried foods:
 - Use only food that was prepared prior to interruption.
 - Discontinue sale of prepared foods.
 - Use prepared food from an alternate approved source (i.e., local deli).
- Use water from an alternative approved source.
- Use ice prepared before interruption.
- Do not use ice in preparing/serving beverages.
- Purchase commercially packaged potable ice.
- Preparing carbonated and other cold/hot beverages:
 - Replace with bottled or canned beverages.
 - Use potable water from an approved alternative source.
- Handwashing by employees:
 - Use potable water from an approved alternative source.
 - Any alternative accepted for employee handwashing must accommodate regular and effective handwashing by employees.
- Cleaning and sanitizing of tableware, kitchenware, vending machine components, equipment and surfaces:
 - Use only single-service tableware and single use kitchenware.
 - Use an approved alternative water source.
 - Take components to commissary for cleaning.
 - Use waterless cleaning or non-potable water for floors, garbage cans, etc.
- Storing of dispensing utensils in dipper wells - Store utensils in food with handles extending out of food.
- Using garbage grinders: dispose of garbage in proper containers with other refuse or in composting facility.
- Flushing of employee toilets:
 - Use adjacent approved facilities, which are readily available.
 - Utilize waterless toilets ("porta-johns").
 - Use non-potable water.
- Flushing of customer toilets and lavatories:
 - Close these facilities.
 - Provide water from an alternative source.
 - Utilize waterless toilets ("porta-johns").

When Water Service is Restored

If a boil water advisory is issued after the water supply is restored, contact your local health department or public water supply immediately for instructions on safely complying with a boil water advisory and flushing facility water supply lines.