Fact Sheet

Water Safety

Temporary Water Supply Disruption –*and*- Boil Water Alerts

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
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Temporary water disruptions that can lead to *boil water alerts* include:

- Bacterial or microbial lab tests indicating the presence of contaminates in the water supply

- Information received from municipal water supply operators reporting:
  - loss in water pressure, damage or break in water supply lines
  - decrease in disinfectant levels within the water supply
- Outbreak of illness within the community that may be linked to the consumption of water –or- products that may have been contaminated by the water
- Electrical power outage (impacting water well pumps) depressurizing water system and exposing the water supply to contaminants
- Heavy rains, snowmelt, or flooding has occurred possibly impacting water wells; contaminants enter through the well cap or vent. Especially vulnerable are shallow wells, older wells and poorly constructed wells.

Boil Water Alerts are ordered by officials and released through local media. Some alerts may be precautionary, ***it is always important to follow instructions and to boil water before use!*** Boiling water does not remove or eliminate chemical contaminants. Monitor media outlets for special instructions from local officials pertaining to chemical releases or contamination threats.

Procedures for Boiling Water

1. Draw water from tap into a "clean", heat resistant container
2. Place container on a safe heat source
3. Heat water until it is brought to a rapid rolling boil
4. Continue a rolling boil for a minimum of five minutes
5. After five minutes, cool water by pouring it in another clean and/or sanitary container and store in a refrigerator. (*The second container will help expedite the cool-down process)*

Safe Emergency Water Sources

If there is not enough water stored, there are home sources that may provide safe, clean water for drinking purposes:

- Water drained from the water heater faucet, if the water heater has not been damaged
- Water dipped from the tank of the toilet (not the bowl) can be used for pets, but do not use water that has been chemically treated or "blue water"

- Melted ice cubes from a known source
- Canned fruit, vegetable juice, and liquids from other canned goods
- Sealed (never opened) bottles of water from a retail store

Unsafe Water Sources

Never use water from the sources listed below for drinking:

- Radiators
- Hot water boilers (home heating system)
- Water beds (fungicides added to the water or chemicals in the vinyl may make water unsafe for use).
- Shallow water wells
- Water found in containers from an unknown source
- Water from swimming pools and spas can be used for personal hygiene, cleaning and related uses, but not for drinking

General Rules Concerning Water for Drinking and Cooking

- Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush teeth, wash and prepare food, or making ice.
- If using bottled water, make sure the seal has not been broken. Otherwise, water should be boiled or treated before use.
- Drink only bottled, boiled or treated water until the supply is tested and found safe.
- Boiling water kills harmful bacteria and parasites. Bringing water to a rolling boil for three minutes will kill most organisms, but not chemically contaminated water.
- If unable to boil water, treat water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets, or unscented household chlorine bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite). If using chlorine tablets or iodine, follow the directions that come with the tablets.
- If household chlorine bleach is used, add 1/8 teaspoon (0.75ml) of bleach per gallon of water if the water is clear. For cloudy water, add ¼ teaspoon (1.50 ml) of bleach per gallon. Mix the solution thoroughly and let stand for about 30 minutes before using it.
- Treating water with chlorine tablets, or liquid bleach will not kill many parasitic organisms; boiling water is the best way to kill these organisms.

Containers for water should be properly sanitized with a bleach solution before using and reusing.

For more sources of information on this topic visit:
ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY (DEQ) www.michigan.gov/deq
FEMA www.ready.gov