

## **Emergency Guideline for Food Facilities during Boil Water Advisory or Other Public Notices**

Water supply warnings are generally required when water suppliers need to provide consumers with immediate and specific actions to take. Water supply warning can be:

- Boil Water Advisory (BWA)
- Do Not Drink Notice
- Do Not Use Notice

**Boil Water Advisory (BWA)-** This type of public notice is typically issued to inform consumer that they should boil their water or use an alternative source of drinking water. They are typically issued because of a microbiological contaminant in the drinking water that presents a threat to public health and safety. Boiling the water will kill the microbes of concern.

**Do Not Drink Notice-**This type of notice is typically issued when the concentration of a chemical contaminant (man-made or naturally occurring) exceeds a health advisory level (HA). Boiling the water is not an option as in many cases it will concentrate the chemical of concern. This water can be used for flushing toilets, bathing or washing.

**Do Not Use Notice-**This notice is issued when there is a situation where the water supply contains a chemical that causes acute health effects by ingestion, inhalation or skin contact. This notice is exactly that DO NOT use the water for any application. Contact your Sanitarian immediately if this type of notice is issued.

**In most situations, retail food facilities will find themselves with a BWA, therefore this document will primarily address BWA situations. Additional comments will be made regarding Do Not Drink Notices and Do Not Use Notices at the end of the document.**

### **What food facilities are affected?**

All food facilities including restaurants, supermarkets, caterers, food service operations in schools, nursing homes and hospitals, charitable food facilities, kitchens in non-profit institutions, food manufacturers and distributors and anyone else involved in the commercial preparation and distribution of food, water and beverages could be affected if a boil water advisory is issued in your area.

### **What does a boil water advisory mean?**

According to the state Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) guidelines for a "boil water" order requires for all water used for drinking, preparing food, beverages, ice cubes, washing fruits and vegetables, should be brought to a rolling boil for at least one minute (three to five minutes, based upon the volume needed in a food facility). Water may be boiled on a stovetop, in an electric kettle, or in a microwave (in a microwave-safe container).

## **What should restaurant, supermarket and food service managers do?**

A food facility manager (or the “Person-in-Charge”) is responsible for conducting both the initial and ongoing assessments to ensure consistent compliance with food safety requirements.

- 1) Assess food, water and ice in your facility affected by the advisory start date
- 2) Implement the appropriate emergency procedures outlined below or remain closed until the boil water advisory is lifted and surfaces are properly disinfected.
- 3) Immediately discontinue operations if a safe operation cannot be maintained using alternative procedures.
- 4) Discard all food, water and ice that may have been prepared with water prior to and during the advisory.
- 5) Follow all water department requirements for flushing lines, and then thoroughly clean, sanitize and air-dry all food contact surfaces prior to resuming normal operations.

## **What should food facilities do to address a current BWA?**

The following are temporary alternative procedures that can be taken to address specific affected food operations during a biological contamination of the water supply (boil water advisory). Where “boiled” water is indicated, the water must remain at a rolling boil for at least one minute. However, large volumes of water should be brought to a rolling boil for at least three to five minutes. Although chemicals (e.g. bleach) are sometimes used for disinfecting small amounts of household drinking water, chemical disinfection is typically not an option for a food facility because of the high concentrations necessary to deactivate certain types of microbes.

## **What are Alternative Sources of Drinking Water?**

- Use commercially bottled water
- Haul water from an approved public water supply in a covered sanitized container
- Arrange to use a licensed potable drinking water tanker truck

## **What should be done about Beverages Made with Piped in Water – including post mix carbonated beverages, auto-fill coffee makers, instant hot water dispenser, juice, tea, etc.?**

Discontinue use of post-mix carbonated beverage machine, auto-fill coffee makers, instant hot water heaters, etc. that use auto-fill or are directly connected to the water supply. Remove and replace any filters that may have been connected to water lines.

## **What should be done about ice?**

- Discard existing ice made after the advisory
- Discontinue routine methods of making ice until boil water order is lifted
- Use commercially manufactured ice from an unaffected water supply

### **What about food products requiring water?**

- Discard any ready-to-eat food prepared with water prior to the advisory or incident
- Prepare foods using commercially bottled or boiled water.

### **What alternatives are there for washing/soaking produce?**

- Do not use tap water for washing/soaking produce.
- Use pre-washed packaged produce
- Use frozen/canned fruits and vegetables
- Wash fresh produce with boiled, commercially bottled water, or safe potable water hauled from another unaffected public water supply system.

### **Can tap water be used to thaw frozen foods?**

- Do not use tap water to thaw frozen foods
- Thaw only in the refrigerator, or as part of the cooking process.

### **Can tap water be used when cooking food?**

- Use commercially bottled water
- Use water that has been at a rolling boil for at least three minutes
- Haul water from an approved public water supply in a covered sanitized container
- Arrange to use a licensed drinking water tanker truck

### **Can tap water be used by employees of a food facility for handwashing?**

- The best practice is to use only boiled, bottled or treated water for handwashing
- Set up a hand-washing station of boiled or bottled water in a closed container with a spigot
- As a reminder -- food handlers must NOT touch ready-to-eat foods with bare hands. Instead they should use physical barriers, such as disposable papers, gloves and utensils

### **Can patrons use tap water in the restrooms during a boil water order?**

- *Patrons* may use tap water for handwashing provided that hand sanitizer is made available at each sink. Be advised, however, hand sanitizer is not 100% effective. If you wish to set up a hand-washing station for your patrons, it is recommended, particularly in situations where the menu consists of finger food and sandwiches.

- Alternative approved water sources are also highly recommended for pre-school-aged children and children who are likely to eat with their hands.
- Post a notice advising patrons not to use tap water for drinking or for brushing teeth.

### **What about cleaning and sanitizing utensils and tableware?**

- Use disposable, single-service utensils and disposable tableware to reduce the amount of boiled or bottled water needed for properly cleaning.
- Cleaning and Sanitizing/ Dish machines:
  - Heat sanitizing dishwashers may be used only if verification can be made via a dishwashing thermometer that the final rinse temperature is reaching 180°F or above for the full rinse cycle and for the time required according to manufacturer's specifications.
  - Chemical sanitizing machines cannot be relied upon as an option based upon the organism of concern. Utilize a manual cleaning and sanitizing procedure with boiled or bottle water. Contact the Department for further guidance.
  - Three Compartment sink basins should be filled using only water that has been boiled as required or is from a potable water source (i.e. bottled water)

### **Can Spray Misting Units be used?**

- Spray misting units used to spray produce, seafood, meat cases, etc. cannot be used.
- Discard any foods exposed to water prior to the advisory and after the advisory was issued.
- Discontinue use of misters until boil water is lifted.

## ***Recovery Phase***

### **What should be done when food facilities have been informed that the water supply is safe again?**

Recovery involves the necessary steps for re-opening and returning to a normal safe operation. The DEP and your local water department will provide specific instructions. **A food facility that was ordered or otherwise required to cease operations may not re-open until authorization has been granted by the Department or Local Health Department.**

After either the municipality or regulatory authority has provided notice that the water supply is safe to consume/use, the person-in-charge must ensure the following has been completed and/or follow the instruction given to you by the water authority:

- Flush all pipes / faucets

- Follow the directions of your water utility (in the newspaper, radio, or television) or, as general guidance, run cold water faucets for at least 5 minutes.
- Equipment with waterline connections such as post-mix beverage machines, spray misters, coffee or tea urns, ice machines, glass washers, dishwashers, and other equipment with water connections must be flushed, cleaned, sanitized and allowed to air-dry in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.
- Remove and replace any water filter (pads or cartridges or similar) that may be connected to any water lines. For example: Ice machine filter, water fountains, beverage units and similar.
- Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle.
- Drain reservoirs in tall buildings.
- Flush drinking fountains: run continuously for 5 minutes, change filters if present
- Ice Machine Sanitation:
  - ✓ Flush the water line to the machine inlet
  - ✓ Close the valve on the water line behind the machine and disconnect the water line from the machine inlet.
  - ✓ Open the valve, run 5 gallons of water through the valve and dispose of the water.
  - ✓ Close the valve.
  - ✓ Reconnect the water line to the machine inlet.
  - ✓ Open the valve.
  - ✓ Flush the water lines in the machine.
  - ✓ Turn on the machine.
  - ✓ Make ice for 1 hour and dispose of the first batch of ice.
  - ✓ Clean and sanitize all parts and surfaces that come in contact with water and ice, following the manufacturer's instructions.
- Water heaters may need to be disinfected and flushed to remove any contaminated water. Some types of water treatment devices may need to be disinfected and flushed to remove any contaminated water. Some types of water treatment devices may need to be disinfected or replaced before being used. Check with the manufacturer for details.

**DO NOT DRINK NOTICES:**

**With this type of notice, boiling the water will not control the situation; therefore, heat sanitizing, chemical sanitizing and cooking/boiling will not suffice to control the water contamination.** *An alternate water supply will be needed.* This alternate supply shall not include water from the effected source that has been 'boiled'. Dishwashers, heat or chemical, may not be used. A 3-comartment method of warewashing using bottled water or an alternate safe supply will be needed. The effected water should not touch surfaces of food, food contact surfaces of equipment or food employee hands. This water should not be used in food as an ingredient, even if the food will be cooked. If an alternate supply of water cannot be obtained a facility may not operate. The above guidelines generally still apply except for those situations that allow for boiled water to be used. Remember these types of notices are issued because some 'chemical' is present in the water that exceeds the allowable HA limits.

**DO NOT USE NOTICES:**

This notice is exactly what it says; do not use any of the water in the facility for any application. This would include not only all of the food safety uses but for handwashing or any use that involves skin contact, activities that promote inhalation from water vapor or supplying to animals, aquatic life or plants. Contact your Sanitarian if this type of notice is issued.

If you have questions or concerns regarding a Public Notice in food facilities, please contact the Department of Agriculture Bureau of Food Safety, your Local Health Department or the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Bureau of Safe Drinking Water.