

BOIL ORDER INFORMATION

Q: What is a “Boil Water” Order? When is a “Boil Water” Order Issued?

Answer: A Boil Water Order is issued by a public water system, on their own authority or by direction of the Department of Health, when there is knowledge that the water has been contaminated, or that it might have been contaminated.

A Boil Water Order means that the consumer should boil any water used for drinking, for beverage or food preparation, or for dishwashing, should be boiled briskly (rolling boil) for one (1) minute prior to use.

Boil Water Orders come in two types.

- **An Emergency Boil Water Order is issued when water samples collected from the water system are found to contain fecal coliform bacteria. This means that the water is contaminated and may harbor disease causing organisms.**
- **A Precautionary Boil Water Order is issued when the water MAY be contaminated. That is, the Department cannot say, with certainty, that the water in the distribution system is safe. Precautionary Boil Water Orders may be issued for a number of reasons. The most common reasons are:**

When the water system has lost pressure due to a water line break, mechanical failure, or power outage. This type of order is issued because all water lines leak to a certain extent. When the water system loses pressure, contaminated ground water could seep back into the water lines, thus potentially contaminating the water in the pipes when pressure is restored.

Persistent failure or significant interruption of key water treatment processes. Safe water depends upon providing multiple barriers between possible sources of contamination and the consuming public. Loss of one or more treatment barriers or turbidity spike in the effluent quality is considered an indicator that the water may be unsafe.

Persistent failure to meet Surface Water Treatment Rule treatment techniques: high turbidity, failure to meet disinfectant contact times or concentrations, or finished water disinfection requirements.

An unusual and significant microbiological challenge to a drinking water source from a spill, discharge, natural occurrence, or other circumstance.

Q: Why Does it Take so Long to Test the Water After it Comes Back On?

Answer: After correcting the deficiency which caused the Boil Water Order, the water utility submits samples to the Department of Health or other certified laboratory for bacteriological analysis to verify that the water is safe for drinking. The tests are designed to identify the presence of coliform bacteria. Coliform bacteria, while not generally harmful, should not be present in drinking water that is safe, and are frequently present in drinking water that is contaminated. Coliform organisms are thus considered indicators of possible contamination of drinking water.

Sample transportation from your water system to our laboratory may take up to 24 hours from the time the samples are collected. The actual test takes approximately 24 hours. The Department requires that safe samples be obtained on two consecutive days. Since our laboratories do not operate on weekends, the complete process of determining that the water is safe may take as long as seven days (after the deficiency)