



Precautionary Boil Water Notices Protect Our Customers

You may have heard about or noticed a significant increase in the number of precautionary boil water notices (PBWN) issued by Destin Water Users, Inc. (DWU) and other local water utilities in the recent past. Does this mean that the quality and safety of our water has declined? Does this mean that DWU's water mains are breaking more so than in the past? Absolutely not! Rather, changes in regulatory rules are now requiring that water utilities in Florida issue precautionary boil water notices whenever water service to an area has been turned off, if even for a short while.

Typically, water service can be interrupted for any number of reasons, most commonly while repairs are made to a water main following a break, or in the course of scheduled maintenance and repair work. Following tropical storms or hurricanes when many uprooted trees cause hundreds of broken water and sewer lines, water service may be shut off system-wide and so boil water notices are often issued, until mains can be repaired and system pressures are restored. After repairs are made, the line in question is flushed until water is clear and a good chlorine residual is detected.

Why is the issuance of a PBWN required? When breaks or changes occur in water lines, the normal pressure in the line may be reduced or lost and the possibility exists for contaminants to enter that line. The odds of this happening are extremely remote, but to be extra cautious precautionary boil water notices are placed in effect while routine bacteriological sampling is conducted. Usually, two separate sets of samples are taken, each needing 24 hours to be considered complete. When both sets of samples come back "clean", the precautionary boil water notice is lifted (or "rescinded"). **These advisories only affect water that is intended for consumption or cooking.**

Consumption includes brushing teeth, washing fruits and vegetables, and homemade ice. Tap water may be used for showering, baths, shaving, and washing so long as care is taken not to swallow or allow water in eyes or nose or mouth. Children and disabled individuals should have their bath supervised to ensure water is not ingested. The time spent bathing should be minimized. Though the risk of illness is minimal, individuals who have recent surgical wounds, are immunosuppressed, or have a chronic illness may want to consider using bottled or boiled water for cleansing until the notice is lifted. For specific health related questions pertaining to precautionary boil water notices, customers may contact the Okaloosa County Health Department's Environmental Health Section at (850)833-9247.

It may seem that this is an added cost in manpower, time, and materials to the utility and certainly a little inconvenient to those water users affected. However, we believe that these types of safeguards are in place to protect our customers, and are therefore worth the added time and cost to DWU.

Food Services, Businesses, and non-residential sites

If you provide water to visitors or employees, use commercially produced bottled water for drinking or beverage preparation (coffee) during the PBWN. You should also take steps such as posting notices at, or disabling water fountains and ice machines. Foodservice operations have several additional requirements and should contact the Florida Department of Business & Professional Regulation at (850)487-1395 for specific instructions.

How to purify water:

In order to ensure a safe and adequate drinking water supply in your home until service can be restored, it is important to disinfect tap water to kill any bacteria or viruses that may have entered the water or to use an alternative source of water (bottled water). To purify the water you can use one of several methods:

Boiling

Boil vigorously (rolling boil) for 1 minute and let cool.

Addition of hypochlorite bleach

- Regular *liquid* bleach from the home laundry or grocery store will work well. **DO NOT** use a bleach that has a fragrance or scented agent.
- Read the label to find the percentage of chlorine available. It should be 5.25%.
- Add 8 drops (or 1/8 teaspoon) to a gallon of water and let stand at least 30 minutes.
- If the water has a strong chlorine smell after 30 minutes, pour back and forth between two clean jugs or containers.

Purification tablets

You can purchase these from a drug store or outdoor recreation supply store. Keep them with your hurricane supplies and use according to directions on the package.

How to store purified water:

- To keep drinking water safe from contamination, it should be stored in clean, non-corrosive, tightly covered food grade containers.
- Prepare two quarts of water per day for each family member and any family pets.
- To increase shelf life of water, group bottles in dark plastic trash bags to keep light out. Store containers in a cool, dark location.
- **CAUTION:** Make sure children don't mistake bottles containing hazardous substances with bottles used for drinking water.

We hope you find this information helpful and encourage you to call our office at (850)837-6146 or visit our website at www.dwuinc.com for further information.