

Boil Water Advisory

Boil water advisory is a public statement advising people to boil their tap water before using it, typically in response to an event that could allow contaminants to enter the water distribution system. Such events include a large water main break, widespread loss of system pressure, or a natural disaster.

Boil water advisories are rarely issued. This is because in most cases, our crews can isolate a main break by closing the nearest valves, then repair the pipe, disinfect it, and flush it before putting it back into service. This prevents contamination from soil and bacteria, which is why boil water advisories are not issued after routine water main repairs.

If we do have to issue a boil water advisory, we will notify the media, post information on this web site and on our phone system, and take other appropriate notification measures, such as phone calls and electronic sign boards.



What is a Boil Water Advisory? Is it the same as a Boil Water Notice?

A Boil Water Advisory (BWA) is a public statement advising customers to boil tap water before consuming it. Advisories are issued when an event has occurred allowing the possibility for the water distribution system to become contaminated. An advisory does not mean that the water is contaminated, but rather that it could be contaminated; because the water quality is unknown, customers should assume the water is unsafe to drink and take the appropriate precautions. An advisory is different from a Boil Water Notice, which is issued when contamination is confirmed in the water system. During a notice, all customers must boil their water before consuming it or use bottled water.

Boil Water Advisory

What should I do during a Boil Water Advisory or Notice?

You should boil tap water vigorously for at least one full minute prior to using it for drinking or cooking (the minute starts when the water begins to bubble). This includes water used for brushing teeth, making ice, washing raw foods, preparation of drinks, and water for pets. Wait for the water to cool before using it, or store it in the refrigerator in a clean container. Boiling removes harmful bacteria in the water that may cause illness. You should throw away ice made during the time the advisory or notice was issued, as freezing does not kill bacteria.

After an advisory or notice has been lifted (if contamination of the water system did occur), you should flush household pipes, ice makers, water fountains, etc. prior to using for drinking or cooking. Flushing simply means letting the water run to ensure that no contaminated water remains in your pipes. Follow these guidelines for flushing:

- Run all cold water faucets in your home for one minute
- To flush automatic ice makers, make three batches of ice and discard
- Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle
- Run drinking water fountains for one minute
- Run water coolers with direct water connections for five minutes.

Do I still need to boil my water if I have a filter system on my faucet or refrigerator?

Most point-of-use (POU) filters are designed to improve the aesthetics of water (improve taste and odor), not remove harmful bacteria. Is the water safe for washing dishes, laundry, and bathing?

The water is safe for washing dishes, but you should use hot, soapy water (you may add one tablespoon of bleach per gallon as a precaution) and rinse dishes in boiled water. There are no restrictions on doing laundry. The water is also safe for bathing during an advisory or notice; if the water is contaminated by a chemical that will cause harm on contact, Charleston Water System will issue a Do Not Use Notice, meaning the water should not be used for bathing.

How long must a Boil Water Advisory or Notice be in effect?

An advisory or notice will remain in effect until test samples show the water is safe to drink. Testing for bacteria requires 18-24 hours to complete, depending on the type of test used. The samples are incubated to actually grow bacteria, if any are present. As a result, advisories and notices will be in effect for at least 18-24 hours.