

Boil Water Order and Advisory Guidelines

What is a boil water order?

A boil water order is issued by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to public water systems when a microbiological threat to the public health exists, or is likely to exist, that can be remedied by boiling the water. (For chemical contamination, boiling may only concentrate the contaminant or expose consumers to more by inhaling it.)

Boil Water Orders and Boil Water Advisories

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2. What is a boil water advisory?

A public water system may issue a boil water advisory when there is concern a problem with drinking water may exist, but it has not yet been confirmed. This may be done, for example, while waiting for results of confirmation samples collected for bacteriological analysis, which can take up to two days plus the time required to transport samples to the laboratory.

3. Who will notify me to boil my drinking water?

It is the responsibility of the water system to notify its customers. Notification varies, depending on whether the system is classified as a community or non-community. Community public water systems pipe water directly to residences; these typically alert their customers by notifying area media, directly distributing notices and posting in logical places. Non-community systems serve customers in a non-residential setting, such as a restaurant, hotel or business that has its own well on site and dispenses this water to customers or employees; this type of public water system is required to post the notice for a boil order near the entrance or in a common area.

4. What role does DNR play in notifying the public?

To assist water systems in reaching their customers, DNR frequently notifies area media of boil water orders at community systems and provides all public water systems with the needed information to distribute and post.

5. What precautions should I take if my water system is under a boil water order or advisory?

The following steps need to be taken:

- Boil water vigorously for three minutes prior to use. Use only water that has been boiled for drinking, diluting fruit juices, all other food preparation and brushing teeth.
- Dispose of ice cubes and do not use ice from a household automatic ice maker. Remake ice cubes with water that has been boiled.
- Disinfect dishes and other food contact surfaces by immersion for at least one minute in tap water that contains one teaspoon of unscented household bleach per gallon of water.
- Note: Let water cool sufficiently before drinking.

6. I don't have time to boil all my family's drinking water, so is it safe to buy bottled water instead?

Buying bottled water may be a feasible, though somewhat expensive, alternative to boiling tap water when under a boil water order. Bottled water operations in Missouri are routinely inspected and monitored by the Missouri Department of Health. This offers a safe source of water for drinking, cooking and brushing teeth. Nationally, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates bottled water. Also NSF International (formerly the National Sanitation Foundation) maintains a list of certified bottled water operations across the country.

7. Do I need to boil bath water?

Water used for bathing does not generally need to be boiled. Supervision of children is necessary while bathing or using backyard pools so water is not ingested. Persons with cuts or severe rashes may wish to consult their physicians.

8. What are the causes of boil water orders and advisories?

There are a number of reasons you may be advised to boil your drinking water. One reason is the confirmed presence of bacteria such as E. coli, indicating microorganisms may be present that can cause disease. Low water pressure that can allow microorganisms to enter water lines and low levels of chlorine that can allow them to persist in the water pipes is another. High levels of turbidity, a measure of suspended particles, is also a possibility.

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