

Understanding Boil Water Advisories

From the Charlotte Harbor Water Association

From time to time, the Charlotte Harbor Water Association (CHWA) must issue Precautionary Boil Water Notices to our customers. While we understand a boil water notice can be inconvenient, it is mandatory that we do so. We have developed some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to help explain when and why boil water notices are required. We hope these FAQs will help our customers understand the need for the notices and provide you with a way to be quickly informed about boil water notices and the subsequent rescission notices.

Why are precautionary boil water notices issued?

A precautionary boil water notice is issued to protect consumers when it is possible that drinking water has been contaminated by microorganisms that can cause illness (i.e. germs or pathogens). Common reasons for a boil water notice include loss of pressure in the water distribution system, loss of disinfection, and other water quality concerns caused by other events such as water line breaks, power outages and floods.

The Florida Department of Health (DOH) requires that all public water system operators issue a precautionary boil water notice to the affected parties within 24 hours upon learning of the situation. The precautionary boil water notice does not mean that the water is contaminated. Because the water quality is unknown, customers should assume the water is unsafe to drink and take appropriate precautions. Until the required bacteriological testing is completed, CHWA will recommend, *as a precaution*, boiling tap water before consuming it to kill any potential contaminants or using bottled water.

How is the public notified?

If the precautionary boil water notice affects only a small number of customers, CHWA will distribute notices directly to the affected customers.

For large affected areas, CHWA provides notice to local media and posts advisories on our website at www.CharlotteHarborWater.com. CHWA also uses the **CodeRED** Emergency Alert System that allows us to notify customers affected by an incident by their geographic area. Residents and businesses can sign up to receive phone calls, texts and/or e-mails. Only authorized officials have access to the **CodeRED** system. The **CodeRED** database contains information obtained from public databases, including regional phone books.

Those with unlisted numbers, cell phones or with blocking devices will not receive these emergency calls unless they enroll.

How long will the boil water notice continue?

A boil water event typically lasts 24 to 48 hours, but it can be longer and may last several days. CHWA is required to collect and submit water samples for two consecutive days to the Florida DOH. Upon satisfactory completion of bacteriological testing showing that the water is safe to drink, CHWA will lift or rescind the boil water notice. Notification of the boil water notice rescission will be made in the same manner listed above.

How do I boil my water so that it is safe to drink?

Bring water to a FULL ROLLING BOIL for 1 MINUTE, then allow the water to COOL BEFORE USE. Because water may take 30 minutes to cool, plan ahead. Make up a batch of boiled water in advance so you will not be tempted to use it hot and risk scalds or burns. Boiled water may be used for drinking, cooking, and washing. The flat taste of boiled water can be improved by aeration: pouring it back and forth from one container to another. In lieu of boiling, you may purchase bottled water or get water from another suitable source.

What if I accidentally drank tap water before I learned about the precautionary boil water notice?

If this happens, don't panic. It is highly unlikely that anything actually entered the water system. If it did, it would most likely be a type of bacteria that could cause digestive irregularities. If severe diarrhea or cramping occurs or if diarrhea or cramping occurs and lasts more than 3 to 4 days, contact your doctor.

If I have breaks in my skin, is it still OK to shower or bathe in water that hasn't been boiled?

It is recommended that if it is a large open wound or if you are immunocompromised, apply a waterproof bandage to the wound or take a sponge bath.

What should restaurants and food establishments such as convenience stores do?

Contact their licensing agency, either the Department of Agriculture or the Department of Business Regulation and follow the Florida's Food Industry Guidelines and use bottled water for food preparation and turn off all ice machines.

What should the medical profession do, such as dentists?

The Center for Disease Control Boil Water Advisories website has information for dental offices, childcare, hospitals, healthcare, nursing homes and dialysis centers.