

CONTAMINATED WATER SUPPLY/WATER INTERRUPTION GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

Occasionally a public water system serving one or more permitted food service establishments will become contaminated with bacterial or viral organisms, chemicals, or experience a water interruption. This has the potential of putting the patrons of those facilities at risk. This document will provide guidance on what you (the Environmental Health Specialist) should do for regulated facilities *before, during and after* such an event.

BEFORE a water interruption event:

1. Create and maintain a directory with the name of the contact personnel at the public utility office in your county or city, and the name of the Emergency Management Director in your county. Establish a relationship with them and make sure they have your contact information so they can keep you informed of a water interruption event.
2. As part of your routine inspection, and during the permitting process of a new establishment, inform the permit holder that as per Chapter 511-6-1-.03(2)(n), when an emergency situation such as a water contamination event/water interruption occurs for **2 hours or more**, they must cease operations unless they have a **pre-approved** emergency action plan in place. ***The operator/permit holder must understand that if their intent is to remain open, then they must submit their plan and have it approved prior to the event occurrence.*** (It is highly recommended that you keep a copy of their plan on file.)
3. During your routine inspections, ensure that facility addresses, phone numbers and email addresses are current. Obtain emergency contact information for each establishment to include a telephone number and email address. Be sure to keep DHD updated with the most current contact information for each facility.
4. Encourage facilities to use the Emergency Action Plan for Retail Food Establishments, Second Edition, created by the Conference for Food Protection (or similar resource) for creating a detailed plan specific to their operation:
 - a. Emphasis should be placed on keeping the operation simple, such as serving a limited menu and using disposable cups and plates, pre-packaged foods if possible, etc.
 - b. It should outline the projected length of time the facility will be capable of operating based on proposed methods to receive water and/or treat water for an extended period of time. For example, a contract with a water hauling company to bring in potable water with a method of storing it in the facility, or feeding it into the facilities existing plumbing, would be a great way to determine a facility's ability to maintain a certain level of operability. (Boiling a couple of pots of water would not be sufficient for extended operations.)
 - c. Specific plans to address toilet facilities should be addressed in the plan as well, if there is no water available to flush.
 - d. It should include specific steps that the facility will take during the recovery phase to address draining and flushing of all affected equipment.

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DURING a water interruption event for facilities WITHOUT pre-approved plans:

1. Confirm with the local public water provider that the public water system is compromised or contaminated; determine the nature of the contamination, and how long the problem is expected to remain in effect. *[Be advised that boiling or disinfecting water works only in situations where the water is unsafe because of the presence of bacteria or viral organisms. In fact, heating or boiling water may actually concentrate certain chemical contaminants. If you suspect the water is unsafe because of chemicals, oils, or other poisonous substances the water is not to be used for food preparation or drinking. Contact the Georgia Environmental Protection Division Drinking Water Section for more information: epd.georgia.gov/drinking-water, or call: 404-463-1511]*
2. Identify all the permitted food service establishments that are served by the contaminated public water system and assure street addresses and telephone numbers are current.
3. If the event is expected to be temporary in nature, lasting for *less than 2 hours*, contact the facilities in the affected area to inform them that there is a contamination or temporary interruption event. Be sure to convey the type of event to the facility (boil water advisory or a do not drink/do not use event) along with the appropriate guidance if the facility plans to stay open. Use Table A and Table B to assess determine guidance.
4. Spot check facilities to ensure their ability to comply with the alternate procedures. Be prepared to close those facilities that are unable to comply. Document communication with PIC.
5. If the interruption is expected to continue to last **beyond 2 hours**, then facilities that do NOT have a pre-approved emergency action plan must close, as per Chapter 511-6-1-.03(2)(n). (It is important to ensure that you have addressed this issue with your establishments during routine inspections and during the permitting stage for new facilities so that WHEN a water interruption/contamination event occurs, the Operator/Permit holder is aware of his/her responsibilities and has communicated with the Health Department the intent to stay open or cease operations.)

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BIOLOGICALLY CONTAMINATED WATER SUPPLY (Table A) LASTING LESS THAN 2 HOURS

If there is a biologically contaminated water event, boiled water or potable water from another approved source can be used. (*Approved water source includes: commercially bottled water, water hauled from an approved public water supply in a covered sanitized container; or approved drinking water from a hauler truck.*) Water should come to a rolling boil for at least one minute prior to use. (Although bleach or other chemical disinfectants are typically allowed for disinfecting small quantities in residential settings for *drinking water*, it may **not** be allowed as an option for food service facilities, because of the lack of onsite equipment for testing chemical residuals.)

Table A

Activity	Biological Water Contamination
*Cooking	Boiled or potable water only
*Cleaning food contact surfaces	Boiled or potable water only
*Dishwashing	3-compartment sink with boiled or potable water only
*Handwashing	Boiled or potable water only
Ice making	Turn off machine until potable water is available; use commercially manufactured ice
Pre-mix soda machines (in bulk, packaged in kegs or bag-in-box and ready to use)	Acceptable to use
Post-mix soda machines (boxes of syrup and CO ₂ , using the facility water source)	Turn off until potable water is available
Coffee/tea machines	If water is boiled as part of the brewing process, acceptable to use

- ❖ It is recommended to use disposable dishes and flatware
- ❖ Biologically contaminated water *can* be used for flushing toilets and cleaning floors, walls and ceilings

OPERATIONS MUST DISCONTINUE IF ALTERNATIVES LISTED ABOVE CANNOT BE USED

*Using biologically contaminated water to wash hands, dishes and food contact surfaces or for cooking with a sanitizing step/cook step at the end is not always effective against parasites and viruses that may be present in the water.

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DO NOT DRINK/DO NOT USE/WATER LOSS (Table B) LASTING LESS THAN 2 HOURS

If it has been determined that the water is not fit for consumption or use, or there is NO water, then the food service establishment MUST have access to potable water from an approved source. (*Approved water source includes: commercially bottled water, water hauled from an approved public water supply in a covered sanitized container; or approved drinking water from a hauler truck.*)

Table B

Activity	Do Not Drink/Do Not Use
Cooking	Potable water only
Cleaning food contact surfaces	Potable water only
Dishwashing	3-compartment sink with potable water only
Handwashing	Potable water only
Ice making	Turn off machine until potable water is available; use commercially manufactured ice
Pre-mix soda machines (in bulk, packaged in kegs or bag-in-box and ready to use)	Acceptable to use
Post-mix soda machines (boxes of syrup and CO2, using the facility water source)	Turn off until potable water is available
Coffee/tea machines	Potable water only
Toilet facilities	Portable toilets with adequate, potable water for handwashing accessible to employees during ALL hours of operation, is acceptable to use

- ❖ It is recommended to use disposable dishes and flatware, and individually wrapped pre-packaged foods with a very limited menu.
- ❖ If the cleanliness of the physical facilities becomes jeopardized by the fact that no water is available for cleaning – operations will need to be discontinued. It is not recommended to use chemically contaminated water for cleaning due to the potential of mixing unknown chemicals.

OPERATIONS MUST DISCONTINUE IF:

- **TOILET AND HANDWASHING FACILITIES ARE NOT AVAILABLE**
- **ALTERNATIVES LISTED ABOVE CANNOT BE USED**

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AFTER a water interruption event:

Any food establishment that was required to cease operations must NOT re-open without the Health Authority's approval.

1. Obtain verification from the local municipal water authority or the GA EPD that the water supply is safe to use.
2. Ensure facilities follow the instructions and guidance from the local water authority.
3. Equipment should be drained and flushed according to manufacturer's recommendations and recovery should be conducted in accordance with the guidelines of the Emergency Action Plan for Retail Food Establishments, Second Edition, created by the Conference for Food Protection (or similar resource.)

For Facilities WITH Pre-approved Plans:

1. Identify the facilities that have pre-approved emergency action plans during the event.
2. Ensure that their pre-approved plan addresses the facility's ability to withstand the type of interruption that has been identified, and that it's practical for the amount of time the problem is expected to persist. (It may be helpful to attach a copy of the plan to their file record in DHD or have a paper copy in their file for quick reference. Additionally, it's recommended that you review the plan periodically with the Operator/Permit holder to ensure it is still viable)
3. Contact the facility by phone or in person to determine if the facility intends to remain open and will operate according to their pre-approved plan.
4. Document all communication to include decision made by the Operator/PIC with regard to staying open or voluntarily closing.
5. Facilities with pre-approved plans will follow the protocol outlined in their plan for resuming operations and in accordance with instructions from the water authority.