Maine CDC
Department of Health and Human Services
Emergency Action Plan
for
Retail Food Establishments

Practical guidance for retail grocery and food service establishments to plan and respond to emergencies that creates the potential for an imminent health hazard.

July 19, 2019

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Acknowledgement: This document was excerpted from the Emergency Action Plans for Retail Food Establishments produced by the Emergency Action Plan Committee of Council III 2012-2014 Conference for Food Protection

Contaminated Water Supply (Biological)

Note: *The following section refers to procedures for when there is a Boil Water Advisory.*

When a municipality has issued a Boil Water Advisory or when an onsite water supply has exceeded the maximum contaminant level for coliform bacteria the permit holder must report to the regulatory authority. The PIC should assess the situation and implement emergency procedures. Immediately discontinue operation if a safe operation cannot be maintained or if food safety cannot be assured using an alternative procedure. If there is a significant threat or danger to health, then an Imminent Health Hazard may exist and the permit holder should immediately discontinue operations and notify the Regulatory Authority. Consider discussing your emergency plan with the Regulatory Authority. Emergency action plans should be available on-site for review. In some cases, the Regulatory Authority may want to pre-approve your plan.

I. ***Planning for Response to a Contaminated Water Supply Incident***

Your food safety emergency plan should include specific details for how you will respond to an official Boil Water Advisory or when an onsite water supply has exceeded the maximum contaminant level for coliform bacteria. **(Refer to EPA requirements or local regulatory authority for guidance.)** For single events affecting an individual establishment, the permit holder should report to the Regulatory Authority as required.

II. ***Assessing a Contaminated Water Incident***

Immediately discontinue operation if a safe operation cannot be maintained. Follow the appropriate emergency procedures if approved by the Regulatory Authority or remain closed until granted approval to re-open by the Regulatory Authority.

In the event of an emergency involving a contaminated water supply, appropriate food establishment responses must be taken after an assessment of the situation. Refer to the assessment factors detailed in the *Interruption of Water Service* section.

A food establishment manager (or the “Person-in-Charge”) is responsible for conducting both initial and ongoing assessments to ensure consistent compliance with food safety requirements.

III. ***Business Continuity During a Contaminated Water Incident***

The following are temporary procedures that can be taken to address specific affected food operations during a boil water advisory or biological contamination of the water supply.

During a boil water advisory, stop food service/food handling operations if safe water cannot be provided either by boiling or using an alternative source. Prepackaged food can still be provided.

Remember that a contaminated water incident impacts all uses of potable water including water for consumption, food preparation, ware washing, handwashing and cleaning/sanitizing food contact equipment and surfaces.

Consider discussing your emergency plan with your regulatory authority. In some cases, the Regulatory Authority may want to pre-approve your plan or temporary procedures.

Boiling Water

Where "boiled" water is indicated for use as potable water, the water must remain at a rolling boil for at least one minute. Chemical disinfection is generally not an option for food establishments because of the lack of onsite equipment for testing chemical residuals. If chemical disinfection is being considered, check with the Regulatory Authority.

Drinking Water

1. Use commercially bottled water and/or water that has been boiled for at least one minute.
2. Haul water from an approved public water supply in a covered, food-grade container that has been cleaned and sanitized.
3. Arrange to use a licensed drinking water tanker truck.
4. Additional information for safe drinking water can be found on the EPA Web site at: www.epa.gov/ogwdw/faq/emerg.html.

Auto-fill Water Appliances and Equipment

Automated equipment used to make beverages including post-mix carbonated beverages, auto-fill coffee makers, instant hot water dispensers, juice and tea dispensers, etc. do not sufficiently heat/boil water to make it safe to drink.

1. Discontinue use of auto-fill appliances and equipment.

Ice Making

1. Discard existing ice.
2. Discontinue making ice.
3. Use commercially manufactured ice made from a safe water source.

Preparing Food Products Requiring Water

1. Immediately discontinue preparing food with potentially contaminated water.
2. Discard ready-to-eat food prepared on-site that may have been prepared with or may have come in contact with contaminated water.

3. RTE food items stored with ice or displayed on ice that could have been made from contaminated water should be discarded.
4. Prepare food using potable water from an approved source such as commercially bottled or boiled water (see above for proper procedures for boiling water).

Washing/Soaking Fresh Produce

1. Use pre-washed packaged produce.
2. Use frozen or canned fruits and vegetables.
3. Clean and sanitize sink with potable water then wash fresh produce with water that has come to a rolling boil for one minute, commercially bottled water or potable water from a safe alternate source.

Thawing frozen foods

1. Thaw food only in the refrigerator or as part of the cooking process.

Handwashing

Remember - if no alternative handwashing procedures can be set up, food preparation must cease, and only pre-packaged food may be served.

When water has known microbiological contamination, remember to use these special procedures:

1. Use bottled water, boiled water, or safe water from an approved source.
2. Do not allow bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food. Suspend otherwise approved alternative procedures for bare hand contact.

Follow these handwashing procedures to ensure safe food handling:

1. When prepackaged foods are provided, the following must also be available if hand wash facilities are unavailable in the immediate area where the prepackaged food is handled:

    a. Approved hand antiseptics or chemically treated towelettes must be used for cleaning hands; and
    b. An operational handwashing sink or a handwashing set-up (as described in Section 2 below) must be provided for use in the immediate area of a toilet facility.

2. When a facility has no handwashing sinks with potable water available, but an alternative handwashing facility can be set up, the following procedures can be followed if food production is to continue:

a. A “gravity flow” handwashing set-up using potable water (e.g. commercially bottled water) in a clean, sanitized container with a continuous-flow type spigot allowing water to flow over one’s hands into a catch bucket.
b. The catch bucket must be emptied into an operational drain such as a janitor sink or toilet.
c. Hands must be washed after emptying the catch bucket and before returning to food handling operations.
d. Suitable, dispensable hand soap, disposable towels, and a waste receptacle at designated hand wash stations must be provided.
e. Ready-to-eat foods may not be touched with bare hands.
f. Suspend bare hand contact even if this process has been approved as an alternate procedure.

3. A handwashing sink with non-potable water must be labeled or otherwise identified to prevent its use.

Cleaning and Sanitizing Utensils and Tableware

During a boil water advisory, it is recommended that you use single service utensils and tableware.

Under emergency situations some regulatory authorities may allow the use of non-potable water for ware washing and sanitizing processes. Sanitizers may not be effective against eliminating parasites and viruses that could be present in contaminated water. Therefore, before using water under a boil water advisory for ware washing or sanitizing, contact the Regulatory Authority for approval.

Before using the existing automatic ware washing machine with non-potable water, consider if the water temperature, cleaning agents and/or heat cycle are sufficient to clean and sanitize utensils and tableware.

Likewise, if using a three compartment sink with non-potable water, consider if the sanitizer concentration and contact time are sufficient to clean and sanitize utensils and tableware.

If using an automatic chemical dispensing system, manually mix chemicals using the manufacturer’s label directions for mixing and provide personal protective equipment required for chemical usage.

Spray Misting Units

1. Automatic misting units should be turned off during boil water advisories.
2. If using a sprayer bottle, it must contain potable water (boiled, bottled or other approved source). The spray bottle needs to be cleaned and sanitized and properly labeled.

Cleaning Physical Facility

1. Discontinue operations if cleanliness of the physical facility could jeopardize food safety.
2. Non-potable water can be used for mopping floors and cleaning other non-food contact surface cleaning.

IV. ***Recovery from a Contaminated Water Incident***

Recovery involves the necessary steps for returning to normal, safe business operations including re-opening if the facility had to close as a result of an unsafe water supply.

Regulatory authorities may have to approve returning to regular operations; check local requirements. A food establishment or an area within the facility that was ordered to cease operations due to an imminent health hazard may not re-open until authorization has been granted by the Regulatory Authority.
Consider the following steps for returning to normal operations after safe water service has been restored and after either the municipality or regulatory authority has lifted the "Boil Water Advisory."

Key actions to consider for returning to normal operation:

1. Document the date and time when the boil water advisory is lifted or when water has been tested and deemed safe for use.
2. Assure that cleaning and sanitizing equipment such as dishwashing machines, three compartment sinks, buckets, etc. are clean and sanitized.
3. Flush pipes/faucets. Follow the directions from your water municipality or, as general guidance, run cold water faucets for at least five minutes.
4. Equipment with waterline connections such as post-mix beverage machines, spray misters, coffee or tea urns, ice machines, glass washers, dishwashers, and other equipment with water connections must be flushed, cleaned, and sanitized in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.
5. Clean and sanitize food contact surfaces, utensils and other equipment before use.
6. Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle.
3. Drain reservoirs in tall buildings.
4. Flush drinking fountains by running continuously for five minutes.
5. Replace filters in equipment such as water chillers, ice machine, etc.

Ice Machine Sanitation

1. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for flushing and cleaning ice machines.
4. Below is a general example of a written cleaning/sanitizing procedure for an ice machine:
    a. Flush the water line to the machine inlet

b. Close the valve on the water line behind the machine and disconnect the water line from the machine inlet.
c. Open the valve, run water through the valve for 10-15 minutes and dispose of the water.
d. Close the valve.
e. Reconnect the water line to the machine inlet.
f. Open the valve.
g. Flush the water lines in the machine.
h. All filters on equipment should be removed and replaced if not designed to be cleaned in place.
i. Turn on the machine.
j. Throw away the first three batches of ice that the machine makes.
k. Clean and sanitize all parts and surfaces that come in contact with water and ice, following the manufacturer's instructions.

2. Alternatively, contact cleaning service provider to clean equipment.

Private Water Source (Non-community water supply)

Food establishments using a Type II or Type III non-community water supply (such as a well) must follow the disinfection and sampling requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act as found in 40 CFR 141 and 142 (Code of Federal Regulations). Contact your Regulatory Authority for specific instructions. Some municipalities may rely on other organizations such as EPA or local Department of Environmental Quality for assuring the safety of non-community water supplies.