

FOOD SERVICE OPERATION WITH WATER INTERRUPTIONS

A sufficient supply of potable water is necessary in a food service operation for handwashing, food preparation, equipment cleaning and sanitizing, and other food service activities. Problems involving the water supply (including ice) are especially important since *water may serve as a direct vehicle of contamination to food or food contact surfaces*.

There are many factors that need to be considered and the alternatives available when deciding what action is necessary to protect the public health in the event the supply of potable water to a food service operation is interrupted.

Whether a food service operation is served by a community or non-community water supply, anticipated and unanticipated interruptions in the supply of potable water can occur. Anticipated interruptions include routine or scheduled maintenance on the pump or plumbing, or, less commonly, the diversion of the water during certain hours each day due to rationing. Unanticipated interruptions include plumbing failure, fire department demands, supply contamination or system failure due to accidents or natural disasters. Many are in no way the fault of the operator.

In the event of an emergency which could result in the contamination of food, including an unexpected interruption in the water supply, it is necessary to protect the public health and to promptly notify the local health department. These alternatives are related to the operations dependency on water (e.g., menu and nature of operation), the anticipated duration of the water interruption, any advance contingency planning, and the ready availability of alternate supplies of potable water, single service tableware/single use kitchenware and other resources.

The alternatives are:

- 1) Temporarily ceasing operation; or
- 2) Obtaining a temporary supply of potable water from:
 - a. Individual serving size containers of commercially bottled water
 - b. Approved piping, tubing or hoses connected to an adjacent approved source
 - c. Bulk water containers filled from an approved source, a water/food tank truck filled with water from an approved source; or
 - d. An approved stationary water tank/cistern filled from an approved source



To be acceptable, an alternate supply must be protected from contamination and must provide enough water to accommodate the public health related operations of the food service. In addition, bulk containers, tank trucks or water tanks used for transporting or storing potable water must be cleaned, sanitized and filled in an acceptable manner.

Water supply interruptions need to be examined on a case by case basis with particular attention given to the public health implications in order to decide if the temporary source of supply is safe and sufficient. Some of the food service operation's activities which should be evaluated along with some optional procedures which may be considered are as follows:

Food Service Activity

Optional Procedure Which May be Authorized

Thawing of frozen foods

Thaw only in refrigerator or as part of the cooking process

Washing of Produce

Obtain and use pre-washed produce; or
Use produce washed prior to interruption; or
Use frozen/canned product; or
Wash fresh produce with potable water from an alternative approved source

Spraying, dipping and soaking produce

Use potable water from an alternate source

Preparing and cooking food, including reconstituting of dried foods

Use only food that was prepared prior to interruption; or
Discontinue sale of prepared foods; or
Use prepared food from an alternate approved source; or
Use water from an alternate approved source

Ice-Making

Turn ice machine off; and
Use ice prepared before interruption; or
Use no ice in preparing and serving beverages; or
Purchase packaged potable ice

Preparing carbonated and other

Turn soda/fountain drink machines and other directly cold/hot beverages connected machines off; and
Replace with bottled or canned beverages; or
Use potable water from an alternate source

Handwashing by employees

Use potable water from an alternate source
(Any alternative accepted for employee handwashing must accommodate regular & effective handwashing by employees)



Cleaning and Sanitizing of tableware, kitchenware, vending machine components, equipment and surfaces

Use only single service tableware and single use kitchenware; or
Use alternate water source; or
Take components to commissary for cleaning; or
Use waterless cleaning or non-potable water for floors, garbage cans, etc.

Storing of dispensing utensils in dipper wells

Store utensils in food

Using garbage grinders

Dispose of garbage in proper containers together with other refuse

Flushing of employee toilets

Use adjacent approved facility which are readily available; or
Utilize waterless toilets (porta jons); or
Use nonpotable water

Flushing of customer toilets and lavatories

Close these facilities; or
Provide water from an alternate source

When these or other alternatives are authorized, increased surveillance of the operation is justified. Surveillance should be comparable to that provided for other operations where facilities are commonly improvised such as temporary food serve at special events.

NOTE!

There may be circumstances where available alternatives are not sufficient to provide acceptable public health protection. Menu diversity, sales, volume, number of employees and other factors can make it difficult or impossible to provide sufficient and suitable alternatives necessary for keeping the operation open. *Further, although employees may be expected to take the extra effort necessary for improvising and for using less convenient alternatives during a short interruption in the water supply, it is not practical to expect them to continue safe practices over time if it is not convenient to do so.* When safe, sufficient and practical alternatives are not available, it will be necessary to cease food operations until water related code provisions are met. Immediate injunctive relief will be sought if operation does not cease.

*If you have any questions regarding this procedure please contact the Delaware General Health District at **740/368-1700**.

*After 5:00pm, the weekend, and holidays please contact the emergency number at **740/815-6518**.

