



Hurricane Harvey and Drinking Water: What you Need to Know

Hurricane Harvey poses a major threat to the safety of drinking water. During and after flooding, water can become contaminated with microorganisms such as bacteria, sewage, heating oil, agricultural or industrial waste, chemicals and other substances that can cause serious illness. It is important to know what precautions can be taken to protect yourself from the dangers of drinking unsafe water.

What can you do to protect yourself?

1. Watch for boil water alerts from the public water system. Electrical outages can impact the municipal water treatment plant that is disinfecting your water. Boil your water or use bottled water for drinking and cooking until the public water system has lifted the boil water alert and has said the water is safe to drink.
2. Private wells can be affected by flood waters. If you have a private well, you should also boil your water or use bottled water until you are sure the water is safe. Well owners are strongly encouraged to test their systems and seek local water treatment and well water professionals for disinfection of their well as soon as the water recedes.
3. Water treatment systems in your home can become contaminated as well. Water treatment systems are ONLY effective for use on potable water (water that is suitable for drinking). DO NOT drink water treated by these systems without first boiling it. Only resume regular use of the water treatment system once it has been disinfected by a water treatment professional.
4. Contact a local water treatment professional for information on disinfecting your well or water treatment system. Visit WQA's website for a searchable database: <http://www.wqa.org/find-providers> or Texas WQA at: <https://twqa.org/>

What is a Boil Water Alert?

A boil water alert is issued by a public water system when there is a known or suspected microbial contaminant in the drinking water which can cause severe health issues. The alert will instruct residents to boil all water used for drinking, cooking, food preparation, brushing teeth, and making ice. Bathing and showering is typically fine as long as no water is accidentally ingested. For more information on a boil water alert notice, consult the municipality, water district, or regulatory agency that has oversight for your water.

Additional resources:

WQA Crisis Response Blog: <http://response.wqa.org/>

CDC Emergency Disinfection of Drinking Water:

https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/travel/emergency_disinfection.html

FEMA Hurricane Harvey Webpage: <https://www.fema.gov/hurricane-harvey>

Texas Office of the Governor Hurricane Resources: <https://gov.texas.gov/hurricane>

The Water Quality Association (WQA) is a not-for-profit association for the residential, commercial, and industrial water treatment industry. WQA proudly serves as an educator of water treatment professionals, certifier of water treatment products, public information resource and voice of the water quality improvement industry. Learn more at <https://www.wqa.org>.



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