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Operating a Food Establishment during an Interruption in Water Service

A temporary interruption of the water supply can significantly compromise the ability of a food facility to operate safely. Therefore, food services managers carefully consider their ability to safely prepare and serve food during the water interruption, and evaluate the need to suspend operations until the water supply is restored. Both establishments served by public water supplies, and individual wells are subject to water service interruptions. These may include a loss of service or the issuance of a boil advisory.

LCHD has developed the following recommendations to reduce the risk of illness during a temporary loss of water service.

Preparing and cooking food, including reconstituting of dried food: Use only food that was prepared prior to the interruption, Use prepared foods from an alternative approved source (facility outside of affected area), Use water from an alternate approved source (i.e. bottled water).

Preparing carbonated and other cold/hot beverages: Replace with bottled or canned beverages, Use water from an alternate approved source.

Ice making: Purchase prepackaged potable ice.

Thawing of frozen foods: Thaw only in refrigerator or as part of the cooking process.

Washing, rinsing, or misting of produce: Use frozen/canned products, Use potable water from an alternate approved source.

Employee hand washing: Use potable water from an alternate approved source. Provide a closed container with spigot above an existing sink. Provide soap and towels Supplement with a hand sanitizer, Minimize hand-contact by using single service gloves.

Cleaning and sanitizing of tableware, kitchenware, vending machine components, equipment and supplies: Use only single service tableware; single use kitchenware, Use alternate approved water source, Take components to other permitted facility for cleaning (outside of the impacted area)

Use of the garbage grinder: Dispose of garbage in proper containers together with other refuse

Flushing of employee toilets: Use waterless toilets (Rent portable toilets), Use non-potable water for flushing

Operation of customer restrooms: Temporarily close facilities, Provide water from an alternate approved source.

Operating a Food Establishment during a Boil Advisory

A safe water supply is required to run a food service operation or a retail food establishment. There are times when a short-term interruption in water service may occur, these include a water outage and when a boil advisory has been issued by the operator of a public water supply (PWS).

A PWS generally issues an advisory if a drop in pressure is experienced due to a main break, power outage, or other distribution failure. The safety of water cannot be judged by color, odor or taste.

To continue operating under a boil advisory, food establishments must use potable (safe to drink) water from an approved source. Bottled water may be purchased for use during the boil advisory, or the water from the PWS may be used after it is treated to kill any bacteria that may be present.

The common uses for water that would require an alternate water source, or the purchase of a prepackaged product to substitute, may include:

- All water used in beverages, such as coffee, tea, or fountain drink dispensers
- All water used as an ingredient in any food products (i.e.: condiments, dressings, desserts, etc.)
- All water used to make consumable ice
- All water used for handwashing
- All water used for washing and sanitizing of food contact surfaces
- All water used for washing of produce
- All water used for sanitizing solution for wiping cloths
- All water used in 3-compartment sinks

The following equipment is plumbed directly into the PWS and must not be used during a boil advisory:

- Carbonated fountain drink machines
- Produce misters
- Beverage “gun” dispensers
- Machines that manufacture ice
- Low-temperature/chemical sanitizing dish washing machines
- Self-serve bulk water dispensers

Depending on why the boil advisory is issued, it may be possible to use one of the following methods for disinfecting small quantities of water in batches:

- Chlorination: Add six (6) drops of liquid chlorine household bleach to one gallon of water and mix. Chlorine bleaches are inexpensive and can be secured from most grocery, discount, or drug stores. Check the label to ensure that the active ingredient, sodium hypochlorite, is 5.25 percent and it is not scented.
 1. Wait thirty (30) minutes after adding chlorine before using the water for drinking or cooking purposes.
 2. If this treatment does not give the water a taste of chlorine, the above instructions should be repeated. Continue adding chlorine until a slight taste of chlorine is present and use this amount for future treatments.

- Boiling: The water may also be purified by boiling. In this method, bring the water to a full boil for at least five (5) minutes. Cool and aerate the boiled water by pouring it through the air from one clean container to another, or mixing rapidly with a clean utensil. Aeration will reduce the flat taste caused by boiling.

Acceptable Equipment/Alternatives to use:

- Hot water sanitizing dish washing machines can be used once checked to ensure 180 degrees F minimum final rinse temperature and adequate water pressure is available.
- Directly plumbed coffee makers are allowable, once checked to ensure brewing temperatures of 180 degrees F or above are produced. (run a pot of water and check with a probe thermometer)
- Instead of using low-temperature/chemical dish washing machines, use a 3-bay sink with a chemical sanitizer at 100 ppm of chlorine.

Food establishments may consider the following alternative procedures to minimize water usage:

- Commercially packaged ice may be substituted for ice made on-site.
- Single-serve items or disposable utensils may be substituted for reusable dishes and utensils.
- Prepared foods from approved sources may be used in place of foods requiring complex preparation.
- Restrict menu choices or hours of operation.
- Portable toilets may be utilized for sanitary purposes (units should include hand washing sinks with their own water source).

Monitor news reports to determine if the boil advisory has been lifted. Once the notice is rescinded, these precautionary measures must be followed:

- Flush the building water lines and clean faucet screens, water line strainers on mechanical dishwashing machines and similar equipment.
- Flush and sanitize all water-using fixtures and appliances of standing water, such as ice machines, beverage dispensers, hot water heaters, etc.
- Run ice machines through one cycle of ice production and discard the ice and clean the bin.
- Clean and sanitize all fixtures, sinks, and equipment connected to water lines.

The Food Establishment management is responsible for operating in a manner that protects the public health. If the operator does not feel that the requirements listed above can be met, they should close the operation until the boil advisory is lifted. If there are any questions during a water emergency, contact the Licking County Health Department at (740) 349-6535.