



Preparing for an Interruption in Water Service or a Boil Water Notice

All food-related operations are affected when no water, no hot water of at least 110°F at 3-compartment sinks, or just a small stream or trickle of water comes out of faucets or when your establishment is under a Boil Water Notice for potentially contaminated water. An interruption in water service (a lack of hot and cold running water under pressure for more than one hour) or a potentially unsafe water supply impacts all uses of water - consumption, handwashing, food preparation, warewashing, and cleaning of the premises.

The following information will assist you in completing the [Preparation for Interruption in Water Services](#) section in the application for a BCHS-accepted Emergency Preparedness Plan.

PLAN AND ACT NOW

List All Water-Use Equipment and Plan for Water Needs

- Identify the location of the shut-off valve at the water main and provide instructions for shutting off the valve during an interruption in water service or a Boil Water Notice.
- List equipment and fixtures that use water. (Sinks, warewashing equipment, ice makers, beverage mixing/dispensing machines, toilets, etc.)
- Determine how much water is needed to operate essential equipment and fixtures as well as to prepare an emergency food menu.
- List all machines with water line connections that will need to be disconnected.
- Arrange for one or more of the following approved water sources:
 - Water hauled from a commercial drinking water refill station or other approved public water supply (not affected by a Boil Water Notice) using covered, food-grade containers
 - Commercially bottled drinking water
 - Water brought to a rolling boil for at two minutes
 - Other arrangement approved by the Houston Health Department Bureau of Consumer Health Services (BCHS) and Houston Public Works (832) 394-8810/8820

Alter Food/Drink Preparation and Service Activities

- Develop and implement an emergency menu that requires minimal water and food preparation and limited equipment/utensil washing.
- Wash/rinse fruits and vegetables with an approved water source or obtain and use prewashed prepackaged produce.
- Suspend bare hand contact with all food. *This includes operations with approved bare hand contact policies in place.*
- Disconnect machines with water line connections (post-mix beverage machines, juicers, spray misters, steam kettles, coffee or tea urns, ice machines, glass washers, dishwashing machines, etc.).

- Use only commercially manufactured ice.
- Use single-service articles

Plan for Handwashing

Running water from an approved source is required.

- Provide one or more of the acceptable alternative for handwashing listed below:
 - Handwashing setup using a clean, sanitized container with a continuous flow spigot that allows water to flow over the hands into a catch bucket
 - empty catch bucket into a working drain such as a mop sink or toilet
 - hands must be washed after emptying the catch bucket and before returning to food preparation
 - Portable handwashing station with running water
- For either handwashing arrangement above:

Stop all food preparation if no alternative handwashing facilities can be set up.

Only prepackaged food may be sold/served.

Approved hand sanitizers must be used for hand cleaning.

- Provide dispensable hand soap, disposable towels, and a waste receptacle at handwashing stations.
- Keep disposable gloves and hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) for use after washing hands.

Make Arrangements for Working Toilets

- Provide an acceptable alternative:
 - Portable flushing toilet with portable handwashing setup on the outside premises and a handwashing setup inside the facility. Ensure transporters of toilet waste have a current transporter permit with the Houston Health Department to haul toilet waste.
 - Water dumped into toilet for flushing if water is available and a working handwashing station is nearby
- Other arrangements (including the use of porta-cans) must be approved by BCHS.

Stop all operations including the sale of prepackaged food if no working toilets are available.

Plan for Cleaning and No or Minimal Dishwashing Operations

- Use only water from an approved supply for cleaning purposes.
 - Cease washing of all multi-use tableware and use single-service articles.
 - Heat water from an approved supply on gas stove to 110° F for cleaning food preparation equipment and utensils, if possible.
- OR**
- Cease food preparation. Only previously prepared ready-to-eat and prepackaged food may be served or sold.

WHEN WATER SERVICE IS INTERRUPTED OR A BOIL WATER NOTICE IS ISSUED

- Call the City of Houston Help line (311) to report no water or no running water under pressure and to determine the estimated length of interruption.
- Call a plumber and stop food preparation and cleaning operations if there is no hot water.
- Implement your establishment's BCHS-Accepted Emergency Preparedness Plan for an interruption in water service for more than one hour or for a Boil Water Notice if and only if no imminent health hazard exists with the implementation and operation of the plan or cease all food-related operations such as food preparation, food handling, warewashing, and cleaning.
- Notify BCHS of the closure or if your establishment is operating under its accepted Emergency Preparedness Plan at www.houstonconsumer.org, chs@houstontx.gov, or 832-393-5100.

Additional Actions to be Taken When a Boil Water Notice is Issued

- Post signs or copies of the Boil Water Notice.
- Stop making ice.
- Discard all ready-to-eat foods stored on potentially contaminated ice.
- Discard all food and ice made with potentially contaminated water.
- Listen for public service announcements lifting the Boil Water Notice.

WHEN WATER SERVICE IS RESTORED OR THE BOIL WATER NOTICE IS LIFTED

Flush Equipment and Clean Up

- For a loss in water service:
 - Flush all pipes in the facility by running every hot and cold water faucet for at least two minutes or until the water is clear.
 - Then clean and sanitize faucet screens.
- For a Boil Water Notice:
 - First run every hot water faucet for five minutes.
 - Then run every cold water faucet for five minutes.
 - Then clean and sanitize faucet screens.
- Flush, clean, and sanitize all equipment and fixtures with water line connections - post-mix beverage machines, spray misters, steam kettles, coffee or tea urns, sinks, and other equipment with water connections in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.
- Clean water line strainers on mechanical dishwashing and glass washing machines and run three complete cycles prior to using dishwashing machine. Verify sanitization by using test kits or a registering thermometer.
- Follow the manufacturer's directions to flush an ice machine, if available, or follow the instructions below.
 - Flush the water line to the machine inlet.
 - Close valve on water line and disconnect water line from the inlet.
 - Open valve, run water through for 10 minutes, dispose of the water, and close the valve.
 - Reconnect to the machine inlet, open valve, and flush the water lines in the machine.

- Replace filters on equipment if not designed to be cleaned in place.
- Turn on the machine and throw away the first three batches of ice.
- Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle.
- Run drinking fountains continuously for two minutes to flush the system.
- Clean and sanitize all fixtures and sinks connected to water lines.
- Change out all filters after water lines have been flushed.
- Clean and sanitize all tools and equipment used for cleaning.

Meet the Requirements to Resume Normal Operations

- Water service has been restored to providing hot and cold potable (drinking) water under pressure.
- The Boil Water Notice has been lifted (if applicable).
- All food and beverages made or rinsed with potentially contaminated water have been properly discarded.
- All plumbing fixtures and pipes have been flushed for the required amount of time, are operating properly, and are in good repair.
- All equipment with water line connections have been flushed, cleaned, and sanitized.
- No imminent health hazard exists

PREPARE TO REOPEN

Meet the Requirements for Resuming Operations

- Refer to the [Requirements to Resume Normal Operations](#).

Contact BCHS at www.houstonconsumer.org or chs@houstontx.gov

- For approval to open if your establishment did not follow a BCHS-accepted plan for an interruption in water service/ or a Boil Water Notice***

OR

If your establishment closed due to another imminent health hazard.

THE BUREAU OF CONSUMER HEALTH SERVICES MUST GRANT APPROVAL FOR YOUR ESTABLISHMENT TO RESUME FOOD OPERATIONS.

- If and only if** your establishment followed a BCHS-accepted plan for an interruption in water service/Boil Water Notice :
 - Normal operations may be resumed once the requirements are met.
 - Notify BCHS that normal operations are being resumed.

Please contact the Bureau of Consumer Health Services (BCHS) with any questions or concerns.

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