

# Water Emergency Facts

Nearly four million people in southeast Michigan receive high-quality drinking water by means of an intricate, and efficient system of water mains operated by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD). The system is so efficient that – most of the time when a water main breaks – residents who live in the area of the break won't notice any change in their service. At most, they may notice a slight change in the pressure of the water flowing from their tap.

Occasionally, a water main break will result in a disruption of service.

## **Q. What is a “Boil Water Alert”?**

**A.** DWSD issues a “Boil Water Alert” when the purity of water in the mains is in question in a specific area or areas. This involves bringing water to be consumed to a rolling boil for five minutes. Let the water cool, then pour back and forth between two sanitary containers to add air for improved taste.

The Department issues Boil Water Alerts in such instances as serious water main breaks, or low pressure.

## **Q. When the purity of the water in the mains is compromised, is it okay to use bottled water for drinking and cooking?**

**A.** Yes.

## **Q. What should I do if my water is completely cut off?**

**A.** In the event of a complete loss of water, Detroit residents should contact DWSD's 24-hour emergency number, (313) 267-7401. Those who live outside of the City of Detroit should contact their local water department at the number listed on your water bills or in the local white pages.

**Q. If I completely lose my water service, are there any other sources of water available for drinking or cooking?**

**A.** In the event of a complete loss of water service, your home contains a number of sources of water suitable for human consumption. These include:

- Water stored in your pipes,
- Water stored in your water heater,
- Water stored in your toilet tank (**NOT THE BOWL, AND ONLY IF IT HAS NOT BEEN TREATED WITH CHEMICALS**),
- Ice cubes from your freezer,
- Rainwater, and
- Snow.

To use the water in your **pipes**, let air into the plumbing by turning on the faucet at the highest point in your house, and drain the water from the faucet at the lowest point.

To use the water in your **water heater**, be sure the electricity or gas is shut off. Open the drain at the bottom of the tank. Start the water flowing by turning off the cold water intake valve above the hot-water tank, and turning on any hot-water faucet. **DO NOT TURN ON THE GAS OR ELECTRICITY WHEN THE TANK IS EMPTY.**

**Rainwater** or water from **snow** should be disinfected before drinking. DWSD recommends bringing this water to a rolling boil for five minutes before consuming.

**Q. If there is a problem with the water in the mains, do I need to purify it for bathing, and personal hygiene?**

**A.** Unless an individual has open sores or broken skin, water does not need to be purified before bathing. Individuals with open sores or broken skin should purify any water used for bathing by bringing it to a rolling boil for five minutes before using.

**Q. Can I use my dishwasher if a “Boil Water Alert” is in effect?**

- A. Most automatic home dishwashers don't effectively sanitize dishes, glasses, and eating utensils. After running a machine load, it is best to rinse them with a pot of water that has been brought to a rolling boil for, at least, five minutes. Allow to air dry before use.

**Q. Will my clothes washing machine be affected?**

- A. Clothes washing should not be affected. However, water under low pressure in mains can contain rust, which can stain clothes. It is best to wait until full service has been restored before doing any wash. Once water service has been restored, run the washer through a cycle in order to flush any foreign matter from the lines.

**For More Information**

You can find more emergency water facts information by clicking below to access the Detroit Fire Department's Family Protection Program Web site:

<http://www.ci.detroit.mi.us/fire/FAMILY%20PROTECTION%20PROGRAM.htm>