

WATER IN AN EMERGENCY

If a hurricane, winter storm or other disaster strikes your community, you might not have access to food, water and electricity for days, even weeks. We all know that water is a survival priority and by taking time now to store an emergency supply, you can provide for your entire family in a disaster situation.

You must have an ample supply of clean water - at least one gallon per person per day. You should store at minimum a two week supply for each member of your family. You will need this water for drinking, food preparation and hygiene. Store your water in thoroughly washed plastic, glass, fiberglass or enamel-lined metal containers. Never use a container that has held toxic substances. Plastic containers, such as soft drink bottles, are best. Seal water containers tightly, label them, and store in a cool, dark place. Rotate water every six months.

If for some reason disaster catches you without a stored supply of clean water, you can use the water in your pipes, hot-water tank, and ice cubes. As a last resort, you can use water in the reservoir tank of your toilet (not the bowl). To use the water in your pipes, let air into the plumbing by turning on the faucet in your house at the highest level. A small amount of water will trickle out. Then obtain water from the lowest faucet in the house. To use the water in your hot-water tank, be sure the electricity or gas is off, and open the drain at the bottom of the tank. Start the water flowing by turning off the water intake valve and turning on a hot-water faucet. Do not turn on the gas or electricity when the tank is empty.

You can find water outside your home from the following sources: rainwater; streams, rivers, and other moving bodies of water; ponds and lakes; and natural springs. This water must be purified before drinking it. Avoid water with floating material, an odor or dark color. Use saltwater only if you distill it first. You should not drink flood water.

How to Purify Water

You should purify all water of uncertain purity before using it for drinking, food preparation or hygiene. There are many ways to purify water. None is perfect. Often the best solution is a combination of methods. Boiling and disinfecting are two methods which will kill most microbes in water. Distillation is a more thorough method as it removes the microbes that resist boiling and disinfecting. It also removes heavy metals, salts, and most other chemicals.

Boiling is the safest method of purifying water. Bring water to a rolling boil for 3-5 minutes, keeping in mind that some water will evaporate. Let the water cool before drinking. Boiled water will taste better if you put oxygen back into it by pouring the water

back and forth between two clean containers. This will also improve the taste of stored water.

Disinfecting involves using household liquid bleach to kill microorganisms. Use only regular household liquid bleach that contains 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite. Do not use scented bleaches, color-afe bleaches or bleaches with added cleaners. Add 16 drops of bleach per gallon of water, stir and let stand for 30 minutes. If the water does not have a slight bleach odor, repeat the dosage and let stand another 15 minutes. Again, the only agent used to purify water should be household liquid bleach. Other chemicals, such as iodine or water treatment products sold in camping or surplus stores that do not contain 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite as the only active ingredient, are not recommended and should not be used.

Distillation involves boiling water and then collecting the vapor that condenses back to water. The condensed vapor will not include salt and other impurities. To distill, fill a pot halfway with water. Tie a cup to the handle on the pot's lid so that the cup will hang right-side-up when the lid is upside-down (make sure the cup is not dangling into the water) and boil the water for 20 minutes. The water that drips from the lid into the cup is distilled.

If supplies run low, never ration water. Drink the amount you need today, and try to find more for tomorrow. You can minimize the amount of water your body needs by reducing activity and staying cool.