

# WHAT'S ON TAP



NEWS FOR DC WATER CUSTOMERS



## DC Water responds to natural, technological and man-made emergencies

DC Water is one of very few water utilities with a robust Emergency Management Team. Further, every department has staff trained in the Incident Management System (ICS), which provides a structure and common language to be used in emergencies. Using ICS, departments coordinate with each other and with partner agencies and stakeholders outside of DC Water. The structure provides roles and responsibilities for public information sharing, operations response, planning, legal, government affairs, safety, and finance. This structure can be used for different types of emergencies.

"Working in the District of Columbia presents unique challenges and needs," says Dusti Lowndes, Director, DC Water Office of Emergency Management. Being the seat of federal government poses greater security risk to critical infrastructure and technology from man-made threats. And while the District's waterways provide recreation and social opportunities, they also pose flooding risks which have increased with more and more intense storms.

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## CEO's Message

Dear Customers:

During the Memorial Day weekend, I got the call that we water utility executives dread -- we had lost pressure in a water main. Under those conditions, bacteria could possibly enter the system. No one wants to issue a Boil Water Advisory, but in these cases, we do it out of an abundance of caution, until we are certain that the water is safe to drink. Thankfully, our redundant system allows us to open and close valves in the area to minimize the number of affected customers, and in this case, testing showed there was no contamination. That was just one of many emergencies we encountered this year. I am always proud and amazed at how quickly our teams come together to address emergencies and solve problems. For example, the increased frequency and intensity of rain storms requires a multi-pronged approach to flooding here in the District. I am proud to serve on Mayor Muriel Bowser's Flood Taskforce that has been developing an Action Plan and ideas for further exploration.



There are numerous ways you can prepare your home or business for a water or sewer emergency. Staying informed should be at the top of the list. Please read this newsletter and most important, sign up for alerts with DC Water and with the District.

**David L. Gadis**

CEO and General Manager  
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# What does that mean?

## *The three types of drinking water advisories*



When a water utility suspects conditions could have led to a drinking water contamination, a drinking water advisory, or public notification is issued. The three main advisories below tell the community what has occurred or is of potential concern, and the steps to take to stay safe.

### **Boil Water Advisory**

A Boil Water Advisory (BWA) means your community's water could have germs that can make you sick. You can still use your tap water. However, it is important that you boil the water or use bottled water for water you consume (ex. to brush teeth, wash foods, and make baby formula). You can still shower, wash your hands, and utilize laundry machines. A precautionary Boil Water Advisory means that the conditions could have allowed germs to enter the system, but there is no indication of that. The precautionary BWA will be lifted once two rounds of sampling indicate no contamination. Special directions are on the next page.

### **Do Not Drink Advisory**

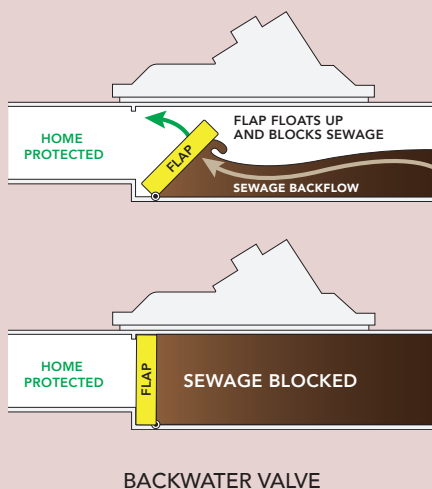
A Do Not Drink Advisory means your community's water could be contaminated with harmful chemicals or toxins. Boiling

water will not make it safe. DC Water may recommend limited use of tap water for some tasks, depending on the harmful chemical or toxin contaminating the water. Use bottled water to brush teeth, wash foods, and make baby formula. In some instances, it will be safe to wash hands, flush toilets, and shower; in other instances, it will not. Follow guidance provided.

### **Do Not Use Advisory**

A Do Not Use Advisory means your community's water is, or could be, contaminated with germs, harmful chemicals, toxins, and/or radioactive materials. Under this advisory, the contaminant might be hazardous to inhale (ex, showering, spraying to wash dishes) or to touch (skin irritant or absorbed by the skin). Do not use tap water from the impacted system for any purpose if this type of advisory is in effect, including for bathing. These types of advisories are rare and it is important to follow advisory guidelines.

**Paying special attention to the advisories that DC Water may release helps you be better prepared and understand the action you should take during a water emergency.**



## Rainstorms can be dangerous —get prepared!

Get Covered! Since most homeowners' insurance policies don't provide standard sewer back up or flood coverage, get insurance to protect your property from water damage. Ask your agent what is best for you. For more information, please visit [disb.dc.gov](https://disb.dc.gov).

Protect your property! Consider installing a backflow prevention device, which can provide some protection from sewer back-ups during storms and sewer pipe blockages. Many sewer blockages are caused by grease and non-degradable tissues. Those should be disposed of in the trash, not toilet.

# How to Prepare for a Boil Water Advisory

A Boil Water Advisory means that you must boil tap water before consuming and/or ingesting. If you drink, brush your teeth with, or prepare food using tap water without boiling it, you could become sick. When a Boil Water Advisory is in effect, it's still safe to shower (as long as you don't drink any shower water), water plants, use dishwashers, and do laundry as normal.



You can boil your tap water by filling a pot or kettle and heating it on a stove until you see bubbles moving from the bottom of the pot to the top. Then, keep it at that temperature for one minute. Make sure to cool the boiled water before using or drinking it.

## How can you prepare for a Boil Water Advisory?

1. Sign up for DC Water Alerts and Alert DC.
2. Follow DC Water on social media & bookmark our website to find recent updates.
3. Store at least one gallon of water per person per day for several days, for drinking and sanitation use.
4. Don't forget to store water for your pets, too!

For detailed information on what you can and cannot do during a Boil Water Advisory, visit [dcwater.com/boilwaterFAQ](https://dcwater.com/boilwaterFAQ).

For more information during an emergency, call the DC Water 24-Hour Command Center: **202-612-3400**.

## Before a storm arrives:

- Check gutters and downspouts to make sure they are clear of debris.
- Keep your leaves and garden clippings off of streets, sidewalks and out of storm drains.
- Report clogged storm drains by calling the 24/7 Command Center at **202-612-3400** or online at [dcwater.com/reportaproblem](https://dcwater.com/reportaproblem) or send a tweet to [@dewater](https://twitter.com/dewater).
- Prepare an emergency supply kit that includes a 3-day supply of food and water.
- Keep a battery-powered radio nearby for important news.

# How much water do I need to store?

Did you know that FEMA advises everyone stock a 72-hour supply of water for emergency use? A severe weather event could damage or destroy water and sewer infrastructure. Or a contaminant coupled with a loss of pressure could cause concern of contamination. Residents should stay alert during a disaster and follow the directions of any drinking water advisories. Residents should store enough water to last at least three days, and if possible, store enough water to last two weeks. How much do you need for drinking, toilet flushing and for other uses?



## Drinking Water

You should store a minimum of one gallon per person and per pet for each day. Keep your water in air-tight containers, at room temperature, and out of direct sunlight. Replace bottled water when it reaches the expiration date, or for non-store-bought water, after six months. Use this water for drinking, cooking and brushing teeth.



## Hygiene

Remember, you likely won't have water to bathe, wash dishes or do laundry. So, if you know in advance that the water shut-off or restrictions are coming, you can fill your bathtub, washtub, plastic tubs, large pots and pans and other containers with water to use for toilet flushing or for a quick sponge bath. Those who live in hurricane-prone areas are familiar with the practice of filling their bathtubs with water.



## How much water in total do I need per day?

1 gallon for drinking + 2 gallons for hygiene/flushing = 3 gallons per person per day; 9 gallons per person for 72 hours; and 42 gallons per person for 2 weeks. If necessary, you can use the water in your water heater for toilet flushing.

## Toilet Flushing

- Flush your toilet with a bucket of water. Pour one gallon directly into the toilet bowl.
- Start slowly at first, then quickly add the rest of the water. The toilet shape and pressure push everything through the pipes.
- No need to use the handle or empty the toilet tank. Save the water in the tank for another day of water restrictions.
- If it's yellow, let it mellow. If it's brown, flush it down.



## Find your shut off valve

### To stop the water flow in an emergency

A burst pipe or leaking plumbing can quickly soak your home or office. Find your emergency shut off valve now so you know where it is in an emergency. Tie a ribbon on it, or better yet, paint it with fluorescent paint or apply fluorescent tape so you can find it, even in the dark.

1. Look for the main valve where the water supply enters your house (usually in the basement) or in a concrete box near the street.
2. If the valve is outside your house, lift the cover with a large screwdriver.
3. Use a pipe or crescent wrench to turn the water off.
4. If you must leave the home when the weather is cold, drain all the water from the system, including the hot water heater.

## Be alerted!

### Sign up for emergency notifications

Sign up for DC Water's alert system to be notified of outages and repairs and for news and press releases:

[dcwater.com/signup](http://dcwater.com/signup)



AlertDC is the official District of Columbia communications system that sends alerts, notifications, and updates from public safety officials and the emergency manager. Learn about traffic conditions, government closures, public safety incidents and severe weather. To get started today, visit [alertdc.dc.gov](http://alertdc.dc.gov)

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Being proactive is a must. So when not in the midst of an emergency, Lowndes' team is developing response plans, developing training and practice exercises, planning for critical infrastructure protection and serving as liaison to DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEMA) as well as regional and federal partners.

In the past year, DC Water has activated its Incident Management Team nearly a dozen times for everything from a precautionary boil water advisory, to flooding, and to a sewer structure emergency.

DC Water is an active member on Mayor Muriel Bowser's DC Flood Taskforce with multiple other agencies to address chronic flooding in the District (see sidebar and [dcfloodtaskforce.org](http://dcfloodtaskforce.org)).

Though preparedness is a year-round job, DC Water expands outreach even more during National Preparedness Month. The more informed and prepared that residents and businesses are, the more resilient they will be in an emergency.



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