



Water Emergencies at Food Establishments

The purpose of this document is to provide general guidance for local health departments in the event of a water emergency that affects food service establishments. Examples of emergencies include, but are not limited to, *E. coli* contamination, an interruption of water service, or an inadequate supply of water. The information provided is not intended to cover all situations, facilities, or types of equipment, but rather should be used as a reference in planning a course of action in consultation with the Department of Public Health Drinking Water Section and Food Protection Program.

When a water emergency occurs, a prompt local health response is required to minimize the risk of disease to the public. An interruption of water service, inadequate supply, or a contaminated water supply, may affect the entire water system or only isolated sections. Water systems in food establishments may be large community supplies or small non-community supplies. The specifics of each water emergency need to be evaluated regarding their potential effects on the water system and the operation of the food service establishments served.

Allowing food establishments to continue to operate once it is known that the water is contaminated, or that an adequate supply is not available, puts the public at an increased risk for foodborne disease.

When a potable water source is not available – either because of contamination with *E. coli* or because of the lack of water in general – the director of health should close all affected food service establishments until an approved, alternate interim water supply can be provided.

The closing of establishments is mainly to provide an interim measure of protection to the public while additional information is being obtained and until the source and scope of contamination has been determined. This temporary closure could be hours or longer, depending on what additional information is obtained about the contamination.

Details on interim measures are provided in the accompanying documents, but clearly, not all measures will be suitable for all types of food operations. Because of the variability of water usage in food establishments, it is imperative that the local health department be involved in the approval of adequate alternate interim water source arrangements.

All available staff should be notified of the emergency to begin preparation for a response. Similar to an outbreak, a water emergency takes priority over other activities and often requires the reallocation of resources.

Also provided are more detailed guidance documents including:

- *E. coli* Contamination/Water Supply Interruption at Food Establishments
- Interim Measures for *E. coli* Contamination/Water Supply Interruption at Food Establishments (available in 5 other languages)
- Summary of Procedures by Local Health Departments During a Water Emergency
- Sample Closure Placard
- Sample Director of Health Order for Water Emergency
- Bulk Water Hauling at Food Establishments
- Guidelines for Reopening of Food Establishments after a Water Emergency

Additional resources previously provided to all local health departments and certified food inspectors include two references - the *AFDO Food Emergency Pocket Guide* and the *CT Disaster Field Manual*.