Washington State Department of
Health

Finding Water in an Emergency

In an emergency, water from your water system may be unavailable or unsafe to drink. These tips will help you find and safely use alternative sources of drinking water.

What are some alternative sources of water inside your home?

- Water can be drained from the drain spout of a water heater. Be sure the electricity and/or gas are turned off before opening the drain. Drain the water into a clean storage container.
    - Never use a container previously used for pesticides, oils, solvents, etc. If you use a hose or your container cannot be cleaned, boil the water you collect from the water heater for at least 1 minute, or add 10 drops of household bleach per gallon and let stand for 30 minutes before using it.
- Water can be drained from the pipes inside your home. First, shut off the water supply into your home. Next, open a faucet on the top floor of your home. Then go to the faucet at the lowest point in your home. Open the faucet and drain out the water you need into a clean container.
- Water from your toilet storage, or reserve tank, can be used if no chemicals have been used in this tank. Do not use this water if it is blue in color because the blue color means chemicals have been used.
- Water that has been placed in ice cube trays in the freezer can be used.

What are some alternative sources of water outside your home?

Before drinking water from the following sources, filter it with either a drinking water filter designed for camping, or a coffee filter, towel, cheesecloth or cotton plug in a funnel, to remove as many small particles as possible. Then boil the water at a rolling boil for at least one full minute. Boiling is best, but if not possible, add 20 drops of household bleach per gallon of filtered water and let stand for 60 minutes.

- Rainwater
- Rivers and streams
- Ponds, lakes and natural springs
- *CAUTION:* Chemical pollutants will not be removed by boiling.

What are water sources to be avoided?

- Avoid water that contains solid materials, has an odor, or has a dark color.

Revised - July 2012