

# Necessary Steps in a Boil Order

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Alton - Yesterday, the city of Alton was under a “boil order”, but what exactly does that mean?

A health department or other governmental agency issues a boil order or boil water advisory when some type of contaminant, such as sewage or other sources of dangerous bacteria, has infiltrated the city’s water system. A number of illnesses can occur such as cholera, diarrhea, E.coli and others, if precautions are not taken. Contamination occurs in a number of ways. It can take place when a water treatment plant fails or a city water pipe has broken. Cities who have been through a natural disaster such as heavy flooding or a hurricane can often find themselves under a boil order, also.

The first thing that typically occurs is when the city notifies the community that the water is unsafe by issuing a “boil order.” Families and businesses are then required to either boil their water before using it or use bottled water until the order is lifted. Most people understand that they cannot drink water directly from their faucet during a boil order, but there are a number of things that are affected by these contaminants – ice cubes, powdered baby formula, pets drinking water, preparing food and dishwasher use. (Unpurified water can be used for washing dishes as long as they are soaked in a mixture of bleach water for at least a minute before using again.)

Once a boil order is lifted, achieving safety isn’t as easy as turning your faucets back on. Appliances such as dishwashers and refrigerators with ice-makers must have their water lines cleared. This can be done by running the ice maker and the dishwasher a minimum of three times before considering it safe. All disposable filters from these appliances should be replaced, as well.

In order to clear your home’s water lines for drinking and food preparation, the homeowner should start with the bottom floor and run all faucets (showers and bathtubs, too) for at least five minutes continuing to move up floors until all lines are clear, then reversing from top to bottom.

When unsure if your water is safe, always err on the side of caution. Your body will thank you.