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TROPICAL STORM/HURRICANE INFORMATION SHEET

RISKS TO WATER SUPPLY DUE TO STORM

Severe weather, especially if accompanied by flooding, can contaminate the public water supply. Water treatment plants may not be operating or water lines may be contaminated. Individuals cannot assume that the water in the affected area is safe to drink.

Listen for public announcements about the safety of the municipal water supply. Drinking contaminated water may cause illness.

If your well has been flooded, it needs to be disinfected and tested after the storm passes and the floodwaters recede. Questions about testing should be directed to your county or state health department.

WATER FOR DRINKING AND COOKING

Safe drinking water includes bottled, boiled or treated water. Remember these general rules concerning water for drinking and cooking:

- Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food or make ice.
- If you use bottled water, know where it came from. Otherwise, water should be boiled or disinfected before use. Drink only bottled, boiled or disinfected water until your supply is tested and deemed safe.
- Boiling water kills harmful bacteria and parasites. Bringing water to a rolling boil for 1 minute will kill infectious organisms (germs).
- Water may be disinfected with chlorine by mixing eight drops (1/8 teaspoon; about the size of a dime) of unscented, ordinary household chlorine bleach (4-6 percent active ingredients) per gallon of water. Mix the solution thoroughly, and let stand for about 30 minutes. Use a container that has a cap or cover for disinfecting and storing water to be used for drinking. This will prevent contamination. However, this treatment will not kill parasitic organisms that may have entered a flooded well. Iodine or other disinfection tablets available at sporting goods stores may also be used.

Containers for water should be rinsed with a bleach solution before reusing them (one tablespoon bleach per gallon of water). Use water storage tanks and other types of containers with caution. For example, fire truck storage tanks as well as previously used cans or bottles may be contaminated with microbes or chemicals. Do not rely on untested devices for decontaminating water.

HOW DO I DISINFECT MY WELL?

It is important to disinfect both the well and plumbing with 4-6 percent chlorine, non-scented household bleach to ensure that all infectious agents are killed. If you have water treatment devices, remove all membranes, cartridges and filters and replace them after the chlorination process is completed.

The amount of chlorine and the length of time you allow it to remain in your system are equally important. Common unscented laundry bleach can be used effectively as a chlorine disinfectant. Follow these steps for the recommended usage amount of chlorine bleach:

- If the water is discolored before chlorination, run the water until it is clear for up to 10 minutes.
- Turn off and then drain your hot water heater—chlorine is not effective in water above 105 degrees.
- Remove and replace charcoal filters after the chlorination process is completed.
- To avoid adding contamination to the well during disinfection, first clean the work area around the top of the well. Remove grease and mineral deposits from accessible parts of the well head and flush the outside surfaces with 1/2 cup of laundry bleach in 5 gallons of water.
- Turn off the pump. Remove the cap or the well plug on the rubber seal. There are many types of well caps and plugs. If you have questions, you should contact a licensed well driller. If you have a submersible pump, you may also want to contact a licensed well driller for advice on disinfection procedures.
- Try to coat the sides of the casing as you pour in one gallon of unscented household bleach (4-6%). If you get chlorine on the pump or wiring, flush it thoroughly with fresh water to prevent later corrosion. Your county health department may issue additional guidance for your area.
- Re-cap or plug the well opening and wait 30 minutes.
- Turn on and, if needed, reprime the pump. Open all the faucets on the system one by one. Allow the water to run until there is a noticeable smell of chlorine. You may also want to flush the toilets. If you have outside faucets, you may want to direct the water away from sensitive plants. If you cannot detect a chlorine odor, rechlorinate the well.
- Turn off all the faucets and allow the chlorine to remain in the system for at least eight hours.
- Backwash water softeners, sand filters and iron removal filters with chlorinated water.

IS IT SAFE NOW?

The only way to verify that the water is safe to drink is to have it tested. Although chlorine bleach is effective against microorganisms, it will not remove chemical contamination that may have gotten into your well. Contact your county health department for sampling instructions to get your water tested. Photos of this procedure are on the USEPA website at:

<http://www.epa.gov/safewater/privatewells/whatdo.html>.

For further information, please contact your local county health department or visit www.doh.state.fl.us or www.FloridaDisaster.org.