

## Safe Water After a Disaster

### How does water become contaminated in a disaster situation?

- After a major storm or earthquake, you must assume that all water sources are contaminated until proven safe. Water contamination can occur when sewage systems are damaged or when there are breaks in the water lines.
- Contaminated water can cause many illnesses.

### How will I know if my water has been contaminated?

- Do not use water that has a dark color, an odor or contains floating material.
- There will be a public announcement to boil the water. This is known as a “boil order.”

### How do I purify my water?

- Water can be purified at home or it can be purchased.
- Water may either be boiled or chlorine bleach may be added. To boil, bring water to a rolling boil and keep it boiling for 3-5 minutes. Pour water into disinfected drinking container (instructions for disinfecting containers provided below). Store in refrigerator if possible.
- To use chlorine bleach, strain the water through a coffee filter or cheese cloth to remove dirt and other particles. Use 16 drops of pure unscented household bleach to a gallon of water. Let stand for 30 minutes. If water is still cloudy after 30 minutes, you may add an additional 16 drops of chlorine to the gallon size container. Let the water stand an additional 30 minutes.
- **Do not use more than the recommended amount of bleach. Excessive amounts can be poisonous.**

### What are the best types of containers to use to store water?

- Use clean plastic or glass containers such as soft drink bottles or canning jars that have tight fitting screw caps. Avoid milk bottles—they do not seal well.
- Use disinfected containers only. Remember to disinfect them again each time they are refilled.

**How do I disinfect drinking water containers?**

- Add one tablespoon of liquid household bleach to a gallon of water into the container.
- Let solution stand for 10 minutes, then pour out. Rinse the container with purified water.
- Fill container again with purified water, then cap the container for later use.
- You may also boil glass bottles or jars to disinfect them. In a large pan, submerge the bottle or jar in water. Bring to a rolling boil for 10 minutes.
- Fill the jars with purified water and cap the container for later use.

**Can I depend on water treatment devices to purify water adequately in these situations?**

- No. The filter can become clogged, therefore, over loading the filter, and providing no protection against the bacteria and viruses in the water.

*Source: Boone County Public Health Emergency Response Plan*