

When Could Your Water Be Unsafe To Drink?

As a water customer, you trust and depend on the City of Columbia to notify you of any problems and ensure that your drinking water is safe. The most common type of problem that public water systems experience is microbial (relating to or caused by microorganisms such as bacteria) contamination, which is communicated in the form of either a boil water advisory or boil water notice. The difference between an advisory and notice depends on the degree of certainty that the water system has been contaminated.

Boil water advisory means an advisory, whether written or verbal (i.e. by television, radio, newspaper, telephone or door to door contact), notifying the users of the water system that the water **may be** contaminated and to boil the water (vigorous rolling boil for at least one minute) prior to using it for drinking or cooking. Circumstances that warrant an advisory include complications with the water treatment process, loss of pressure in a significant portion of the distribution system, water line break where dirt and debris have entered the distribution piping, and prior to a hurricane making landfall.

Boil water notice means a notice, whether written or verbal, notifying the users of the water system that the water **is** contaminated and to boil the water (vigorous rolling boil for at least one minute) prior to using it for drinking or cooking. Notices are issued when both routine and follow-up testing confirms the presence of pathogenic (disease-causing) organisms in the drinking water.

Immediately following an advisory or notice, the City of Columbia Water Works takes corrective actions to resolve the problem and conducts extensive bacteriological testing. Once we determine that the distribution system is free of any microbial contamination, the repeal of an advisory or notice is distributed in the same manner as it was issued.