

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **What is a Precautionary Boil Advisory?**

A Precautionary Boil Advisory is a public statement advising people to boil their tap water before using it, typically in response to an event that could allow contaminants to enter the water distribution system. Such events include a water main break or loss of system pressure.

The type of notification will depend on the size of the area affected by the Precautionary Boil Advisory. If the affected area has been isolated to a small area of the water distribution system, RMWC will use the automated calling system to notify the affected customers. For larger areas, RMWC will use the automated calling system and news outlets to notify the customers.

The Precautionary Boil Advisory information will also be posted on RMWC's website.

### **What should I do during a Precautionary Boil Advisory?**

You should boil tap water vigorously for at least three minutes prior to using it for drinking or cooking. This includes water used for brushing teeth, making ice, washing raw foods and preparation of drinks. Wait for the water to cool before using it or store it in the refrigerator in a clean container. Boiling removes harmful bacteria in the water that may cause illness. You should throw away ice made during the time the advisory or notice was issued, as freezing does not kill bacteria.

### **Do I still need to boil my water if I have a filter system on my faucet or refrigerator?**

Most point-of-use (POU) filters are designed to improve the aesthetics of water (improve taste or odor), not remove harmful bacteria. You can learn about the capability of your filter by contacting the manufacturer or NSF International, an independent testing group located in Ann Arbor, Michigan (phone 1-800-673-8010). If in doubt, you should boil your water or use bottled water even if you have a filtering system.

### **Is the water safe for washing dishes, laundry and bathing?**

The water is safe for washing dishes, but you should use hot, soapy water (you may add one tablespoon of bleach per gallon as a precaution) and rinse dishes in boiled water. There are no restrictions on doing laundry. The water is also safe for bathing during an advisory or notice. If the water is contaminated by a chemical that will cause harm on contact, RMWC will issue a DO NOT USE NOTICE, meaning the water should not be used for bathing.

### **How long must a Precautionary Boil Advisory be in effect?**

An advisory will remain in effect until test samples show the water is safe to drink. The Indiana Department of Environmental Management, the state agency which regulates the drinking water industry in Indiana, requires that two successive tests taken at least 24 hours apart confirm that no bacteria is present prior to lifting the advisory. Each sample is incubated for 18-24 hours, depending on the type of test, to actually grow bacteria if any are present. As a result, advisories will be in effect for at

least 48 hours. If any bacteria is found in the samples, the water line will continue to be flushed by RMWC and the advisory will remain in effect until two consecutive samples have shown the absence of bacteria.

### **What is total coliform bacteria?**

Total coliform bacteria are a collection of microorganisms that live in larger numbers in the intestines of humans animals, as well as in most soils and surface water. A sub-group of these microorganisms is the fecal coliform bacteria, the most common member being E coli. These bacteria occur naturally in lakes and streams, but indicate that the water is contaminated with human or animal waste and therefore may pose a health risk to people who drink it. The water treatment process removes these bacteria from the water, but events such as water main break or a loss of pressure in the water distribution system may allow these bacteria to enter water lines through cracks in pipes or back-siphoning from a residential plumbing system. Boiling water vigorously for one minute will kill these bacteria and make water safe to drink, although RMWC recommends boiling the water for three minutes to remove any doubt or differences of interpretation of how long the water has actually been at the boiling point.

### **Under what circumstances will RMWC issue a Precautionary Boil Advisory?**

The Indiana Department of Environmental Management regulates water utilities throughout the state and specifies instances when an advisory must be issued. An advisory must be issued in the following instances:

- If untreated water reaches the distribution system
- Distribution system pressure falls below 20 psi
- A water main break where dirt and debris may have entered the distribution piping

### **How will I know when the advisory has been lifted?**

RMWC will issue an All Clear of the Precautionary Boil Advisory notice when the samples have confirmed that no contamination is present. RMWC will post information on this website and notify customers by the same method that the advisory was issued. RMWC will use the automated dialing system (One Call Now) and the news outlets to notify the customers of the All Clear.

### **Since an advisory is precautionary measure, will I get sick if I drink the water? What if I drank some water before I found out about the advisory?**

Until test results show the water is safe to drink, you should not drink the water without boiling it first. If you are in good health, chances are that you will not get sick from drinking the water. Young children, some of the elderly and people with severely compromised immune systems have a higher risk of getting sick. Symptoms of illness caused by bacteria in the water may include diarrhea, nausea, headaches or other symptoms. Please note that these symptoms are not caused only by organisms in drinking water. The symptoms may have a cause that is unrelated to drinking water. If you experience any of these symptoms and they persist, you may want to seek medical advice.