

There's Been a Disaster and My Family Needs Water! What Do I Do Now?!

Central Missouri relies on the Missouri River and drilled wells for its supply of water. This water is treated before being pumped directly to your house. There have been times in the past when the water supply was disrupted. This handout addresses the need for you to provide potable or usable water for your family when the water supply is disrupted again.

What is Potable Water?

Potable water is what you drink, use for cooking, and to brush your teeth. Potable water has been treated to remove disease-causing organisms like Giardia. You do not need potable water to launder clothes, wash your hands, or to shower provided you are using detergent and antibacterial soap. Water used for cleaning and bathing only needs to be free of dirt. Whenever a water company issues a boil order, the water is still usable for cleaning and bathing. Boiling or treating the water makes it potable.

How Do I Make Potable Water?

To make water potable boil it for at least one minute. Start the timer when the water has roiling bubbles. If you have no way of boiling water you will have to treat your water. You can treat your water with iodine tabs (available from any store carrying camping supplies) or household bleach. The bleach must be chlorine bleach (used for laundering whites). Do not use scented bleaches, colorsafe bleaches, bleaches with added cleaners, or chlorine intended for swimming pool use.

Instructions for using the iodine tabs vary due to the different concentrations between brands. Follow them exactly. For bleach use one quarter teaspoon of bleach for every gallon of water and let sit for 30 minutes. If after 30 minutes the water doesn't have a slight bleach odor, add another one quarter teaspoon and let sit for an additional 15 minutes. When treating water in a container such as a 2 liter soda bottle, loosen the cap and turn the bottle upside down so some of the water drips out before using the water. This cleans the threads of the bottle and cap.

There's No Water From the Tap? What Do I Do Now?

The Missouri River will probably have some water, as will the Osage River and many creeks in the area. You will need a bucket or a large container to get the water and additional containers for filtering and treating. You will have to filter the water prior to boiling or treating.

Retailers catering to backpackers carry filtering systems but they are expensive. Coffee filters are an effective way to filter the water. Use a rubber band to secure the filter to the container you will use to treat the water. Pour the water through the filter from the container used to collect the water. Try to use only one container for collecting water. Do not use the coffee filter to where it's falling apart.

What Do I Need to Keep on Hand?

You can spend a lot of money on camping grade water bottles and a filtration system. You can save a lot of money by keeping some 2 liter soda bottles (or juice bottles) handy for treating water. Have at least one bucket (an old cat litter bucket will do nicely) for collecting water. Rubber bands and one unopened pack of coffee filters for filtering. Keep on hand at least one full gallon of chlorine bleach. Consider keeping on hand 5 gallons of bottled water (in a mix of 1 gallon and .5 liter sizes) per person in the family.