

Being Prepared

Learn how to store water properly for emergencies, droughts

In the wake of severe weather that has plagued different areas of the country in recent years, the federal and state governments have urged citizens to prepare emergency kits containing enough food, water, medication, and other necessities for several days. Now is a good time to brush up on the guidelines as we enter the time of year that often brings severe storms and droughts.

Surveys have shown that although people are willing to save water for emergencies, many do not know how to do so properly. Townships should share the following water storage methods with their residents as outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Two easy methods

Standard emergency guidelines suggest storing one gallon of water per day for each person and pet for at least three days or up to two weeks. A normally active person generally needs to drink at least two quarts of water each day. Water is also needed for washing dishes, personal hygiene, etc. Family members' individual needs and habits may affect how much water should be stored, as well.

There are two easy methods for storing water that has not been commercially bottled, depending on the water source and whether it is contaminated. If the water comes from a public supplier or has been disinfected, store it in clean, sanitized plastic soda bottles or milk jugs with screw-on tops. The bottles or jugs should be washed thoroughly with warm, soapy water. Do not

use hot water, as it may start to break down the plastic in the bottles and cause a leak or cause you to ingest some of the plastic.

Sanitize the containers by adding one teaspoon of household bleach to a quart of water. Pour it into the container, shake it well, and let it sit for two minutes. Empty the container and rinse it out with potable water.

Fill the bottles or jugs with water from the tap, cap tightly, and label each container with “Drinking Water” and the date it was filled. Store the water in a dark, dry, cool place.

If the water has not been used within six months, empty the containers and use the water for plants or other nondrinking purposes. Repeat the steps to clean and sanitize the bottles and fill them with fresh water. Make sure to update the label with the new storage date. *(For commercially bottled water, follow the bottler’s recommended expiration date.)*

Purifying contaminated water

If your water comes from a contaminated source, it must be disinfected or purified before it can be used. This is often the case after widespread flooding. Before disinfecting water, however, it sometimes must be filtered. If the water contains visible particles, let them settle to the bottom, then strain the water through a clean cloth, paper towels, or a coffee filter before disinfecting.

One way to disinfect water is by boiling it. Boiling is the surest method to make water safer to drink by killing disease-causing organisms, including viruses, bacteria, and parasites. Bring the water to a full, rolling boil for one to three minutes. After it has cooled, fill containers that have been cleaned and sanitized as described above.

Keep in mind, however, that boiled water will taste “flat” because much of the oxygen has been removed. To put oxygen back into the water, pour it back and forth between two clean containers several times and allow it to stand for several hours.

The second way to disinfect water is by adding household bleach. Do not use bleaches that are scented, color-safe, or have added cleaners. Add eight drops or about 1/8 teaspoon of plain liquid bleach per gallon of water. Mix it thoroughly and allow it to stand for at least 30 minutes before using it.

The water should have a slight bleach odor. If it does not, repeat the dosage and allow it to stand for another 15 minutes. Fill clean containers and store as described above.

For more information about safe drinking water, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Web page for Personal Preparation and Storage of Safe Water at www.cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency/safe_water/personal.html.