



## ***E. coli* Contamination/ Water Supply Interruption At Food Establishments**

A sufficient supply of potable water is necessary for hand washing, food preparation, equipment cleaning and sanitization, and other food establishment operations. Whether an establishment is served by a private or public water system, interruptions in the supply of potable water can occur. Unanticipated interruptions, water shortages or water quality problems, include plumbing failure, fire department demands, and supply contamination or system failure due to accidents or natural disasters.

At first notification of a water emergency by the supplier and/or the Department of Public Health (DPH) Drinking Water Section (DWS), the scope and magnitude of such emergency may not be known. The director of health shall consult with the DWS and the DPH Food Protection Program (FPP) to determine the nature and scope of the emergency.

If the DWS determines that there are violations of PHC Section 19-13-B102 and/or PHC Sections 19-13-B51a–19-13-B51m for the public drinking water system serving a food service establishment and that they constitute an immediate and substantial hazard to the public health- such as an *E. coli* violation - the local director of health should order the food service establishment(s) to cease operation immediately.

The local director of health's order would reference PHC Section 19-13-B42 (g) as the violation and PHC Section 19-13-B42 (u)(3) for the enforcement action and order immediate closure because of the immediate and substantial hazard to public health posed by the water quality violation.

It is necessary to close food establishments initially to 1) stop the use of contaminated water or operating without water; 2) allow for the distribution of information on approved interim measures; 3) allow for the implementation of interim measures by the affected food establishments; and 4) allow time for the review and approval of the specific alternate measures by the local health department.

Water supply interruptions need to be examined on a case-by-case basis with particular attention given to public health implications in order to determine if the temporary source of water supply is safe, adequate, and feasible.

After consultation with the DWS and the FPP, the director of health may allow the food service establishment to resume operation on an interim basis. The director of health may allow an approved, adequate alternate interim drinking water supply if it can be provided. Additionally, adequate measures must also be taken to remove any contaminated food, beverages, and water, and affected food-contact surfaces and equipment must be adequately cleaned and sanitized.

To be acceptable, an alternate supply must be protected from contamination and must provide enough water to provide satisfactory methods for hand washing, food preparation, equipment cleaning, and sanitation of the establishment. Interim measures are not to be interpreted as approved long-term alternate methods.

An evaluation should consider the food establishment's dependency on water, the nature of the operations, menu diversity, sales volume, number of employees and the anticipated duration of the water interruption. When safe, sufficient and practical alternatives are not available or not suitable, it will be necessary to cease food operations until water related code requirements are met. The local director of health has primary responsibility for determining the adequacy of the control measures. The FPP and DWS provide support and technical assistance to the local health department in making decisions relative to the continued safe operation of a retail food service establishment. FPP staff will be available for consultation and as resources allow, for on site assistance.

Local health departments will need to monitor the implementation and efficacy of the control measures. Follow-up assessments will also be needed to determine what is required to resume safe operation. Each food establishment must be evaluated regarding areas/equipment that may have been contaminated. Based on the findings of the investigation the local health director will determine if the retail food establishment can safely resume operations or if specific actions are required to further reduce the risk to public health.

**A food establishment that was ordered or otherwise required to cease operations may not re-open until the local director of health has rescinded the order and granted authorization.**