

## To Boil or Not To Boil?

It is not uncommon, in the state of Florida, for communities to be served with a **Boil Water Notice or Alert**. Why, if you look up **Boil Water Notice or Alert** on your favorite Internet browser, you can frequently find one issued for a Florida community. They are a routine matter of public health. So, what is a **Boil Water Notice**? It is a precautionary requirement issued by the local health authority when there is a threat of microbial contamination of the public water system. How does it affect me, my restaurant or my lodging facility? As a responsible business owner, you **must** comply with it. You certainly don't want to take any chances with the health of your patrons or employees. Why has a **Boil Water Notice** been issued? Typically a **Boil Water Notice** is issued by your local government or the public water provider if one of the following situations has arisen:

- Bacterial levels in the water could impact public health;
- Zero or negative pressure in the public water system has occurred, meaning that there was a water distribution system equipment failure, a power outage, or a drastic reduction of stored water in tanks;
- Low water pressure which could cause the public water system to be contaminated due to backflow or back-siphonage;
- Breaks in water mains or scheduled interruptions in service that are determined to be imminently hazardous to the water system because water system integrity can't be guaranteed;
- Wells have been flooded due to storms or other unusual circumstances.

To comply with the **Notice**, you must follow the precautions provided by your local health authority or water service provider. Below are some tips towards compliance:

**Do not use tap water or ice made during the Notice.**

**Do not cook with or process food with water that may be contaminated.**

**Do not wash hands, dishes or wares with water from the potentially contaminated water source.**

**Do not clean equipment with water which could be contaminated.**

**Do not have any bare-hand contact with food during the Notice.**

- ✓ Use bottled water or bring water from the tap to a rolling boil for one minute.
- ✓ Or, if you are without power, use 1/8 of a teaspoon of unscented household bleach per gallon of water and let stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cloudy add 1/4 of a teaspoon of unscented household bleach and let stand for 30 minutes.
- ✓ Discard any ice made during the **Notice**.
- ✓ Disconnect all beverage dispensing machines to prevent their use during the **Notice**.

- ✓ Wash hands as necessary with water from approved sources as noted above, and use a commercial sanitizing solution on the hands or make one using 2 teaspoons of household bleach combined with 1 gallon of water. Use disposable paper towels for hand drying. Single service gloves may be used after proper hand washing.
- ✓ Food equipment that must be cleaned during the **Notice** may be cleaned with steam or with a sanitizing solution comprised of 50 to 100 ppm bleach and approved water or another commercially available sanitizer.
- ✓ Dishes and wares may be cleaned by manually washing, rinsing and sanitizing using approved water as noted above.
- ✓ Use single service articles whenever possible.

You will be advised that the **Boil Water Notice** is rescinded directly by your local health authorities and/or through the local media.

After it is lifted, you should take a few more steps to insure that you are coming back on line properly:

- Throw away the first batch of ice made by all automatic ice machines;
- Reconnect all beverage dispensing machines;
- Run the water at each connection for at least five minutes to insure that the water lines have been properly flushed.

For more information about **Boil Water Notices**, check out the Division of Hotels and Restaurants official Industry Bulletin dated June 1, 2005 at [www.MyFlorida.com/dbpr](http://www.MyFlorida.com/dbpr). Information for this article has been summarized from that document and from documents produced by the Florida Department of Health.

Serving more than 10,000 members across Florida, FRLA is committed to safe-guarding the needs of the hospitality industry and improving the business climate. Led by Carol Dover, President/CEO, and an active Board of Directors, FRLA has influenced legislation resulting in over \$1.2 billion in tax and fee savings over the past decade. To learn more about the FRLA, visit [www.frla.org](http://www.frla.org) or call 888-372-9119 to find out how you can get involved.

Susan McKinley is a regular columnist and contributor to FR&L Magazine and is a former Director of the Florida Division of Hotels & Restaurants.