

Stories of communities affected by this year's hurricane season have dominated the news for weeks already, and there are still two more months left in the season. Every year hurricane season serves as a reminder of the importance of being prepared for the unexpected.

One of the most common occurrences during an emergency such as a hurricane is loss of electricity. For those who live in homes that obtain their drinking water from a well, this also means a loss of water, unless a backup generator is used. Public water users do not necessarily lose water if the power is out, but if the power is lost at the local water treatment plant or pumping station, then they too can go without water.

To prepare for the possibility of water loss, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Homeland Security recommend storing a three-day supply of water for everyone in your household. Plan for each person to utilize one gallon of water per day. To store water, collect it from your tap into plastic or glass containers with caps. Water collected from the tap will last at least six months, as it has been chemically treated with disinfectants that will help prevent microbes from growing in it. To limit any bacterial growth, water can be refrigerated if space allows.

Bottled water is also a good source of drinking water, particularly in emergencies, but it does not have as long a storage shelf life as tap water. This is because it often does not contain any disinfectants.

If in an emergency you ever find yourself without any water, safe water can be collected from the hot water tank as well as the toilet tank. It is however advisable, that this water be boiled before it is consumed.

Another possibility in emergencies is that water may become contaminated and unsafe to drink. This is particularly common in areas that are affected by flooding. Customers of the public water supply in Albemarle/Charlottesville have been fortunate in that there is no record of a "boil water" notice ever having been issued. In the event that flooding affects our area, it is important to listen for advisories from the local water suppliers about the safety of the water supply.

If water is ever determined to be unsafe for drinking, a boil water notice will be ordered. This will encourage all water users to first boil their water at a rapid roll for one to three minutes before drinking it. The boiling of water removes potential contaminants. Boiling water for any longer than one to three minutes should be avoided, as this will concentrate minerals and metals, actually making the water less safe to drink.

Should a boil water order be given when you have no method to do such, water can be treated with bleach. Simply add eight (8) drops of new, unscented, bleach into each gallon of water to be cleaned. Stir the water well and let it stand

for thirty (30) minutes before you use it. This will eliminate most contaminants, it will not however, kill parasitic organisms.

While we hope to never have to be without water for any extended length of time, it is always wise to plan for the unwanted and unexpected. Should you ever have questions regarding the safety of your drinking water following an emergency, call your local water supplier for guidance. The Albemarle County Service Authority can be reached at 434.977.4511 and the City of Charlottesville Public Works Department at 434.970.3800.