Emergency Guideline for Food Facilities during Boil Water Order

What food facilities are affected?
All food facilities/establishments including restaurants, supermarkets, caterers, food service operations in schools, nursing homes and hospitals, charitable food facilities, kitchens in non-profit institutions, food manufacturers and distributors and anyone else involved in the commercial preparation and distribution of food, water and beverages are affected by the boil water advisory issued.

What does a boil water order mean?
According to the state Department of Environmental Protection's guidelines for a "boil water" order all water used for drinking, preparing food, beverages, ice cubes, washing fruits and vegetables, should be brought to a rolling boil for at least one minute (or the length of time in the advisory) on a stovetop, in an electric kettle, or in a microwave (in a microwave-safe container).

What should restaurant, supermarket and food service managers do?
A food facility manager (or the "Person-in-Charge") is responsible for conducting both the initial and ongoing assessments to ensure consistent compliance with food safety requirements.
1) Assess food, water and ice in your facility affected by the advisory start date
2) Implement the appropriate emergency procedures outlined below or remain closed until disinfection of contaminated items occurs and boil water advisory is lifted.
3) Immediately discontinue operations if a safe operation cannot be maintained using alternative procedures
4) Follow all water department requirements for flushing lines and thoroughly clean and sanitize all food contact surfaces prior to resuming normal operations if closed.

What should food establishments do to address a current boil water order?
The following are temporary alternative procedures that can be taken to address specific affected food operations during a biological contamination of the water supply (boil water advisory). Where "boiled" water is indicated, the water must remain at a rolling boil for at least one minute. Large volumes of water should be brought to a rolling boil for at least three to five minutes. Although chemicals (e.g. bleach) are sometimes used for disinfecting small amounts of household drinking water, chemical disinfection is not an option for food establishments because of the lack of onsite equipment for testing chemical residuals.

What are Alternative Sources of Drinking Water?

• Use commercially bottled water

• Haul water from an approved public water supply in a covered sanitized container

• Arrange to use a licensed potable drinking water tanker truck.

What should be done about Beverages Made with Piped in Water – including post mix carbonated beverages, auto-fill coffee makers, instant hot water dispenser, juice, tea, etc.*?*
Discontinue use of post-mix carbonated beverage machine, auto-fill coffee makers, instant hot water heaters, etc. using auto-fill. Remove and replace any filters that may have been connected to water lines.

What should be done about ice?

• Discard existing ice made after the advisory and clean and sanitize ice bins

• Discontinue routine methods of making ice until boil water order is lifted

• Use commercially manufactured ice from an unaffected water supply.

What about food products requiring water?

• Discard any ready-to-eat food prepared with water prior to the advisory or incident

• Prepare ready-to-eat food using commercially bottled or boiled water.

What alternatives are there for washing/soaking produce?

• Do not use tap water for washing/soaking produce.

• Use pre-washed packaged produce

• Use frozen/canned fruits and vegetables

• Wash fresh produce with boiled, commercially bottled water, or safe potable water hauled from another unaffected public water supply system.

Can tap water be used to thaw frozen foods?

• Do not use tap water to thaw frozen foods

• Thaw only in the refrigerator, or microwave as part of the cooking process.

Can we continue to use the Reverse Osmosis System?

- No because RO systems are not intended to kill bacteria or viruses which may cause disease.

Can tap water be used when cooking food?

• Use commercially bottled water

• Use water that has been at a rolling boil for at least three minutes

• Haul water from an approved public water supply in a covered sanitized container

• Arrange to use a licensed drinking water tanker truck.

Can tap water be used by employees of a food establishment for handwashing?

• The best practice is to use only boiled, bottled or treated water for handwashing.

• If that is not possible, and handwashing is done with soap and tap water, you must thoroughly dry your hands with paper towels and then use a hand sanitizer.

• As a reminder -- food handlers must NOT touch ready to eat foods with bare hands. Instead they should use physical barriers, such as disposable papers, gloves and utensils.

Can patrons use tap water in the restrooms during a boil water order?

• Patrons may use tap water for handwashing provided that hand sanitizer is made available at each sink.

• Post a notice advising patrons not to use tap water for drinking or for brushing teeth.

What about cleaning and sanitizing utensils and tableware?

• Use disposable, single-service utensils and tableware.

Or

• Use the existing automatic dish machine or the 3-compartment sink. Make certain that the sanitization step is being properly conducted (sanitizer concentration/temperature).

• Heat sanitizing dishwashers

o May be used only if verification can be made via a dishwashing thermometer that the final rinse temperature is reaching 185 F or above for the full rinse cycle.

o If this cannot be verified, after removal from the dishwasher, all dishes should be dipped in an approved sanitizer, followed by proper air drying.

• Chemical sanitizing machines

o May only be used if the chemical sanitizer level can be verified to 100 ppm chlorine AND the contact time of the rinse cycle is 1 full minute

o If this cannot be verified, after removal from the dishwasher, all dishes should be dipped in an approved sanitizer (verified to be 100 ppm chlorine), followed by proper air drying.

 Three Compartment sinks

o Sink basins should be filled using only water that has been boiled as required or is from a potable water source (i.e. bottled water)

o The three compartment sink method of cleaning can then be utilized with verification that the sanitizer in the 3rd compartment is at the proper concentration.

Can Spray Misting Units be used?

• Spray misting units used to spray produce, seafood, meat cases, etc cannot be used.

• Discard any foods exposed to misters after the advisory was issued or any that may have been exposed to contaminated water prior to the advisory.

• Discontinue use of misters until boil water is lifted.

Recovery Phase

What should be done when food establishments have been informed that the water supply is safe again?

Recovery involves the necessary steps for re-opening and returning to a normal safe operation. The TCEQ and water department will provide specific instructions. **A food establishment that was ordered or otherwise required to cease operations may not re-open until authorization has been granted by the local health department.**

After either the municipality or regulatory authority has provided notice that the water supply is safe to use, the person-in-charge must ensure the following has been completed:

• Flush all pipes / faucets

• Follow the directions of your water utility (in the newspaper, radio, or television) or, as general guidance, run cold water faucets for at least 5 minutes.

• Equipment with waterline connections such as post-mix beverage machines, spray misters, coffee or tea urns, ice machines, glass washers, dishwashers, and other equipment with water connections must be flushed, cleaned, and sanitized in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.

• Remove and replace any water filter (pads or cartridges or similar) that may be connected to any water lines. For example: Ice machine filter, water fountains, beverage units and similar.

• Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle.

• Drain reservoirs in tall buildings.

• Flush drinking fountains: run continuously for 5 minutes.

• Ice Machine Sanitation:

- ✓ Flush the water line to the machine inlet
- ✓ Close the valve on the water line behind the machine and disconnect the water