



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

TEMPORARY SWITCH TO CHLORINE FOR WATER TREATMENT DISINFECTION

February 1, 2010 – May 17, 2010

What are drinking water disinfectants?

Chlorine and chloramine are common disinfectants used for killing potential bacteria in water systems and added at the drinking water treatment plant.

Why is the disinfection treatment process temporarily switching to chlorine?

A temporary change in drinking water disinfection is an annual program to clean the city's distribution pipes and maintain high water quality throughout the year. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Washington Aqueduct is responsible for treating drinking water in the District and will switch from chloramine to chlorine during this period.

During the treatment process, the Washington Aqueduct disinfects the drinking water in two phases, primary and secondary disinfection. Typically, the District of Columbia's drinking water is treated with both chlorine and chloramine. Chloramine is the secondary disinfectant that is used most of the year and limits the exposure to disinfection byproducts associated with chlorine.

For a short period each year, the Washington Aqueduct temporarily switches both phases of disinfection to chlorine and does not use chloramine. This temporary switch to chlorine is a standard water treatment practice.

When is this switch scheduled?

The temporary switch to chlorine will occur February 1, 2010 through May 17, 2010.

Will chlorine levels be regularly tested during this period?

Yes, DC WASA routinely collects and analyzes samples throughout the city to ensure chlorine levels meet a stringent target level and federal drinking water standards.

What can I do if I notice any changes in the taste, smell, or appearance of my water?

During this period, you may notice a slight change in the taste and smell of your drinking water. Any changes in water color should be temporary. If you are experiencing a chlorine taste and odor, DC WASA recommends running your cold water taps for 5 – 10 minutes. DC WASA also recommends collecting and refrigerating cold water in an open pitcher after running your cold tap for at least two minutes. Within a few hours, the chlorine taste and odor will disappear and the water will be conveniently cold for drinking.

If your water is discolored, run the cold water tap until the water is clear. In the unlikely event that the water remains discolored or cloudy, contact the DC WASA Water Quality Division at 202-612-3440 (Mon – Fri, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.).

What are disinfection byproducts?

Disinfection byproducts (DBPs) form when chlorine and other disinfectants react with natural material found in the Potomac River and may be associated with reproductive health and other long-term health effects. As a result, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) enforces regulatory limits for two groups of DBPs linked to health risks, known as trihalomethanes and haloacetic acids.

In 2000, the Washington Aqueduct switched from the use of chlorine to chloramine for secondary disinfection to reduce DBP levels and to comply with EPA's strict standards. This treatment change resulted in a significant decline in regulated DBP concentrations. For additional information and DBP monitoring results, please visit the DC WASA [Water Quality Website](#).

Will disinfection byproducts increase during this period?

The short-term use of chlorine is important for maintaining high water quality throughout the year, but will temporarily increase DBPs during this period. Despite this temporary increase, DC WASA will routinely monitor water quality to verify disinfection byproduct levels remain below federal drinking water standards.

Will this switch affect facilities that take special precautions to remove chloramine from tap water?

Customers who normally take special precautions to remove chloramine from tap water, such as dialysis centers, medical facilities and aquatic pet owners, should continue to take the same precautions during the temporary switch to chlorine. Most methods for removing chloramine from tap water are effective in removing chlorine.

Why is this switch longer than previous years?

The upcoming switch will occur for three and a half months. This longer period was determined as the most appropriate length of time for cleaning the distribution system pipes and ensuring high water quality is delivered throughout the year.

I recently read that the Washington Aqueduct will be permanently switching from gaseous chlorine to liquid chlorine (sodium hypochlorite). Is this related to the temporary switch from chloramine to chlorine?

In January 2010, the Washington Aqueduct will begin to phase in a permanent switch from gaseous chlorine to liquid chlorine. Liquid and gaseous chlorine are two different forms of the disinfectant, equally effective in killing potential bacteria. Liquid chlorine, known as sodium hypochlorite, is the same ingredient found in household bleach and much safer to transport and store than gaseous chlorine.

The permanent switch to liquid chlorine will not affect the annual program for temporarily switching from chloramine to chlorine. Chlorine will continue to be used for primary disinfection and temporarily used for secondary disinfection; the form of chlorine will simply switch to liquid for improving safety at the treatment plant. For more information, please see the [DC WASA FAQ](#) on switching to sodium hypochlorite

How is DC WASA notifying the public about this switch?

DC WASA and the Washington Aqueduct released a joint media alert prior to the temporary switch in disinfection. Customers can also find more information on DC WASA's website at www.dcwasa.com or contact the Water Quality Division at 202-612-3440 (Mon – Fri, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

For Additional Information:

[DC Water and Sewer Authority](#)

[Environmental Protection Agency](#)

[American Water Works Association](#)