

Private water sources in bushfire-affected areas

Public health bushfire information

Introduction

If you live in a bushfire-affected area your water source could become contaminated from debris, ash, small dead animals or aerial fire retardants.

If the water tastes, looks or smells unusual, do not drink it or give it to animals.

Also, you should not source water from a creek that has been affected by bushfire as the water may be contaminated.

Water drawn from deep bores or wells should continue to be safe to use.

How can I prevent my water tank from becoming contaminated?

The most effective way to prevent contamination of your water tank is to:

- ensure your tank is properly sealed
- disconnect the down pipes to your tanks as soon as there is a bushfire risk
- only reconnect the down pipes when the roof has been cleaned post bushfire (either

What if it rains before I can disconnect the down pipes?

- Water testing is not necessary as contamination is usually obvious. If your water has changed in taste, colour or smell, it should not be used for drinking or food preparation.
- Water that is not suitable for drinking can still be used on the garden.

Dead animals on your roof, in your gutters or in your tank should be removed and disposed of using gloves. Disinfect tank water before re-using.

Water can be disinfected by bringing the water to a rolling boil, or using chlorine (bleach).

To disinfect your tank water using chlorine, use the following instructions.

For every 1,000 litres of water in your tank you can safely add:

- approximately 125 mL or 125 g of 4% chlorine household bleach, or
- approximately 40 mL or 40 g of 12.5% chlorine liquid swimming pool or dairy factory chlorine, or
- approximately 8 mL or 8 gⁱ of 65% granular 'swimming pool' chlorine.

After chlorinating, you should wait at least 24 hours before using the water to allow for microorganisms to be destroyed.

Avoid using household bleaches that contain detergents or other chemicals such as perfumes.

When can I start using my rainwater tank again for drinking water purposes?

If the water in your tank has not been contaminated, the water should be safe to use. However, do not reconnect your down pipes until your roof has been cleaned.

- If the water tastes, smells, or looks unusual, use an alternate supply for drinking.
- Only clean the ash and debris from your roof and gutters when it is safe to do so.
- It should not be necessary to clean your tank after a fire unless it is grossly polluted or smells and tastes unusual as a result of aerial fire retardants.
- If you wish to clean your tank it is recommended you engage a specialist contractor, as working in a confined space is dangerous.

ⁱ Note that 1 teaspoon is approximately 5 grams.

For further information

- Local water cartage or tank cleaners – contact the Environmental Health section of your local council.
- General fire safety advice – contact the Victorian Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667.
- Bushfires and public health - refer to the bushfire information fact sheets available from the Environmental Health Unit, Department of Health and Human Services at:
<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/bushfires.htm>

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