

School Water Outages

Over the years both the Indiana State Department of Health and local health departments have received numerous calls from concerned parents, students, teachers and other school officials about proper procedures for handling water outages at schools. [Rule 410 IAC 6-5.1](#), the Sanitary Schoolhouse Rule, requires that safe, potable water from an approved source be supplied to all fixtures at all times when a school is occupied. Therefore, unless buses are en route, no school shall open without an adequate supply of potable water at useable pressures. Water pressure will be adequate if water fixtures operate as designed. However, if either water pressure is lost or a boil water order has been issued, sometime during the school day, then students and parents are better served if the school remains open for the rest of that day. Depending on the scenario, one the following applies:

In the case of a water outage:

1. Provide bottled drinking water and hand sanitizer for use by students and staff at all times.
2. Use bulk water from an outside source to periodically flush the toilets and urinals throughout the day.
3. Use the following alternative procedures to minimize water usage during the day:
 - Commercially packaged ice may be used instead of ice made on-site.
 - Single-service items like paper plates, paper cups, and disposable utensils if food is to be served.
 - Serve food prepared by other approved sources instead of preparing food on site.

In the case of a boil water order:

1. Provide bottled drinking water and hand sanitizer for use by students and staff at all times.
2. Leave the toilets and urinals in operation.
3. Cease using showers, drinking water fountains and hand sinks.
4. Cease using directly plumbed carbonated fountain drink machines, beverage "gun" dispensers, machines that manufacture ice, and low-temperature/chemical sanitizing dishmachines.
5. Cease using piped water to make beverages such as coffee, tea, or reconstituted milk or fruit drinks.
6. Cease using piped water to wash produce, or to make food or ice.
7. Cease using piped water to wash or sanitize food contact surfaces or to sanitize wiping cloths.
8. Hot water sanitizing dishmachines can be used if they are checked to ensure that the final rinse reaches a temperature of 180°F, minimum. Likewise, directly plumbed coffee makers can be used if they are checked to ensure that the brewing temperature reaches 180°F, minimum.

In either scenario if lunch will be served, food preparation must be reduced to manageable levels commensurate with the availability of potable water. The local health department must be contacted as soon as possible so they can address meal preparation and ware washing in greater detail.

Finally, parents, students and teachers should be notified as soon as possible about the event, and what the school has done to address the problem, via student take-home fliers or the local news media. Otherwise, rumors will be rampant.

If you have any questions concerning the above, please contact Dennis H. Ehlers at AC 317/233-7588