

Purge with Free Chlorine & System Flushing FAQs

Q: What is happening?

A: Conducting system flushing is a part of prudent utility practice. Flushing will remove sediment from the system that has been in the pipes for a long time. Sediment accumulates in the pipes over a period of time, and the odors can occur as the chlorine that is used to treat the water dissipates in the system. When the Utility temporarily changes the disinfection process, your water will be disinfected with free chlorine rather than combined chlorine/ammonia (chloramines). This conversion to free chlorine (which is a stronger, faster-acting disinfectant) from chloramines (which is a longer-lasting disinfectant) allows the Utility to perform a water distribution system purge as recommended by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for water utilities using chloramines as their primary disinfectant.

Q: Is this common?

A: Flushing and purges with free chlorine (the use of free chlorine for disinfection) are routine distribution system maintenance conducted by utilities with chloramine disinfection. Purges with free chlorine also reduce the potential future occurrence of coliform or other types of bacteria in the system.

Q: Who has been notified of this issue?

A: Customers in the affected areas typically receive notification in a variety of ways. Depending on the timing of the maintenance and the size of the system, customers will receive notification via letter, billboard, their Homeowner's association, phone or email.

Q: Why am I being notified about this?

A: The Florida Department of Environmental Protection's reporting requirements require water utilities to provide notifications to the public when treatment methods change.

Q: Will customers notice any changes in the water during this process?

A: This process will not cause adverse health effects. However, during this period, you may notice some discoloration and or cloudiness in your water. The cloudiness can also be caused by the dissolved hydrogen sulfide gas (which is odorous) converting to elemental sulfur. You may also find air pockets in the system. The discoloration and air are harmless. If you do come across this, you may want to run water through the tap until it runs clear*. Some areas may also experience a temporary fluctuation in water pressure or a slight increase in the taste and odor of chlorine.

Discoloration in laundry can occur. You may wish to purchase and use a cleaning additive available at local grocery or home improvement stores. Including this while washing should prevent (or remove) any discoloration that may otherwise occur.

***Please look at the last Q & A on this list**

Q: Will this impact dialysis patients?

A: Customers who use tap water for kidney dialysis at home should properly monitor their process for complete neutralization of disinfectant residual and should contact their doctor for more information.

Q: Will the chlorine affect aquatic life?

A: To condition tap water for use in an aquarium, de-chlorinating products should be used that neutralize both combined and free chlorine. The water should be tested with a kit that can measure both combined and free chlorine.

Q: What about my laundry?

A: Customers should check for discolored water before adding clothes to their washing machine. If discolored water appears, customers can simply set their washing machine to spin cycle to purge the water, and then refill the machine with clear water. In addition, customers may wish to purchase and use a cleaning additive available at local grocery or home improvement stores. Including this while washing should prevent (or remove) any discoloration that may otherwise occur.

Q: When will conditions improve?

A: It is possible that discoloration and slight odors could occur throughout the process as sediment moves through the lines. During the purge with free chlorine, the Utility conducts flushing, which may lead to customer's seeing sedimentation and discoloration of the water. Once all of the flushing is completed, customers should experience clean, quality water*. This process varies depending on the size of the system. Typically, the entire process is completed within three to five weeks from the time that a purge with free chlorine/flushing program is implemented.

Q: Do I need to boil my water?

A: No, boiling water is not necessary, as long as the water continues to meet Federal and State standards for safe drinking water during the program. However, customers may notice a slight change in the taste and smell from the water and may want to let their water tap run for several minutes or until the water runs clear.

Q: Do I need to do anything?

A: After the first couple of days following the start of the purge with free chlorine, Homeowners can help move fresh water through their household by letting any outside potable water tap (NOT an irrigation tap) run full blast for about 5 minutes. You will know the fresh water has moved though your house if the water runs from cloudy to clear and has a noticeable chlorine smell to it. If you have a chlorine test kit (a pool kit will work) you should see a chlorine residual of 2-5 milligrams per liter at your inside taps.

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