

Emergency Water from Water Heaters and Toilets!

A source of water that most people don't think of in an emergency is already in your home: Water in toilet tanks (not bowls), water in your water heater, and water in your pipes. You may have 50 gallons of fresh water! Here's how to get it.

First, turn off the water valve to your home so you will not have contaminated water coming into your pipes.

Second, turn off the electrical power to your water heater. (There is a circuit breaker for this in your electrical breaker box.) If you drain the water heater and the power comes on, in theory you can generate enough steam to make the water heater blow up. Assuming you live, you will never live this down.

Toilet tanks: These are the tanks that hold water for flushing, NOT the water in the toilet bowls. Dip the water out with cups, and treat it with 6 drops of chlorine bleach per gallon before using it. After you have dipped out the fresh water, you can flush the toilet by filling the tank with undrinkable water.

Water in the pipes: Drain this water by opening the lowest faucet in your house. It should already be safe to drink. If concerned about it, treat it.

Water heater: Let the water cool for a few hours. There is a clean-out valve at the base of the water heater you can use to drain the water heater. However, you'll need to have airflow into the water heater so it can drain. Make the air flow by turning on a hot water faucet. If this doesn't work, you may have to disconnect the water input line on top of the water heater. The water in your water heater should be safe to drink, but some experts recommend treating it anyway.

When you have electrical power and running water again, turn the water valve on first. Let your water heater and toilet tanks fill up. Turn on your hot and cold water faucets and leave them on until they flow smoothly. Then you can turn on the electricity to your water heater.

Gas water heaters: You will turn off the gas supply for your water heater. Everything else works the same as with an electric water heater. However, once the emergency is past, you should have someone from the company who supplies your gas turn on the gas and light the pilot lights for any gas appliances, including your water heater, gas stove, or gas furnace.

Water Usage: Most water heaters hold at least 40 gallons. At the rate of 1 gallon per person per day, 40 gallons of water provides drinking water for 1 person, 40 days; 2 persons, 20 days; 3 persons, 13 days; or 4 persons, 10 days. That's water for drinking only - not for washing, cooking, or any other purpose.