



Reopening Closed Buildings: Flush Plumbing to Ensure Water Quality

As our community begins to reopen businesses and facilities that have been vacant for several weeks, building operators should take steps to flush their plumbing to ensure water quality in their facility. Stagnant water is a potential health risk and can impact water quality. Buildings that have shut down or significantly reduced their water use have increased the risk of *Legionella* bacteria growth and the leaching of heavy metals from the building's plumbing system.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued guidance to ensure that building water systems are properly managed after a prolonged shutdown. This guidance can be found on the City's website at www.SantaBarbaraCA.gov/Water

Each building is unique and actions to flush private water lines will depend on the complexity of private systems, plumbing configurations, water use patterns, and fixtures. The CDC has guidance specific to pools and spas, hotels, healthcare facilities, cooling towers, HVAC systems, water heaters, p-traps, and more. If your facility contracts with a water treatment specialist, contact them to determine what steps need to be taken to recommission your facility.

The purpose of building flushing is to replace all stagnant water inside building piping with fresh water. If, during flushing, you experience discolored water, continue to run the water until it becomes clear. Water used during flushing is typically minimal and does not tend to impact your billed consumption. General flushing guidelines include:

- Flush cold water through all points of use (e.g., hose bibs, showers, sink faucets) for several minutes. If flushing a hose bib, direct the water to the landscape if possible.
- Then flush hot water until it reaches its maximum temperature.
- Flushing may need to occur in segments (e.g., floors or individual rooms) due to facility size and water pressure.
- Determine if your water heater manufacturer recommends draining the water heater after a prolonged period of disuse. Ensure that all maintenance activities are carried out according to the manufacturer's instructions or by professionals.
- Make sure that your water heater is set to 120°F - 130°F
- After flushing, if you have any point of entry water treatment system, such as a water softener or filter, replacement of the filters may be necessary.

The City's water system is built and operated using the latest treatment technology to effectively remove and disinfect all bacteria and viruses, including COVID-19. The City uses chlorine as a residual disinfectant to ensure water quality throughout the water system. However, chlorine dissipates over time reducing its disinfection capacity. Water that has entered a building and remains stagnant for several weeks is at risk of elevated bacteria levels as well as leaching metals from the building's pipes.

For more information on the City's water quality, please visit www.SantaBarbaraCA.gov/Water or call the Water Resources Laboratory at (805) 568-1008.