

Public Health Information -

Private water sources in bushfire-affected areas

Introduction

If you live in a bushfire-affected area you should be aware your water source could become contaminated from debris/ash or small dead animals. Also, if you source water from a creek affected by bushfire then assume this water is contaminated.

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

How can I prevent my water tank from becoming contaminated?

The most effective way to prevent contamination of your water tank is to disconnect your down pipes from your tanks until the roof has been cleaned (either manually or after a good flush of rain).

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 colour, taste or smell, then 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 in your tank should be removed using gloves and disposed of appropriately and your tank water should be disinfected 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 1000 litres of water in your tank you can safely add:

- 4% chlorine household bleach* (approx) 125 mL or 125 g
- 12.5% chlorine liquid swimming pool or dairy factory chlorine (approx) 40 mL or 40 g
- 65% granular "swimming pool" chlorine (approx) 8 mL or 8 g (note 1 tsp = approx 5 g)

* Note: Avoid 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. Note:

- If the water tastes, smells, looks unusual you should use an alternate supply for drinking.
- You should 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 grossly polluted. If you wish to clean your tank it is recommended you engage a specialist contractor, as working in a confined space is dangerous.

Further information

- For further advice about local water cartage or tank cleaners, contact the Environmental Health Officer in your Council.
- For information relating to bushfires and public health (e.g. 'Bushfire smoke and your health' and 'Hazards on your property after a bushfire') go to:

http://www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/emergency_mgmt/index.htm - bushfires or call the environmental health information line on 1300 761 874.