



Using rainwater after a bushfire

Environmental Health

Water in rainwater tanks on your property can be contaminated during or after a bushfire, either indirectly by ash, smoke, debris or directly by fire and firefighting activities.

The following information is from the Department of Health WA and is relevant for residents who may have contaminated rainwater tanks as a result of the recent bushfire.

How can I tell if my rainwater tank has been contaminated?

Assume that your rainwater is contaminated if it:

- tastes or smells unusual
- is cloudy
- has an unusual colour
- contains debris, or
- if the water level has changed (increased)

Do not use contaminated rainwater for:

Drinking, preparing foods, making ice, washing, bathing or cleaning teeth (or watering animals) until tested by a laboratory if:

- you think your roof was covered by fire suppressant water either dropped by aircraft or sprayed from ground units
- your gutters and rainwater has become contaminated by ash
- your rainwater tank has been burnt by fire and the internal lining material is damaged
- if the plumbing to or from the tank is damaged

You can use contaminated rainwater for:

- flushing toilets
- watering the garden
- washing clothing (providing it will not stain clothes)
- washing cars
- fighting fires

Use care if you are considering using contaminated rainwater to fill swimming pools or in evaporative air conditioners as ash and other debris may clog filters and pumps. Contact the manufacturer for more advice.

Can I treat rainwater if it has been contaminated?

No. It is extremely difficult and potentially expensive to remove effectively any contamination caused by fire suppressants or any other potentially harmful by-products caused by ash from burnt bush, plastics and metals.

Tank cleaning

Claire from Great Southern Liquid Waste, Mt Barker has offered their business services free of charge to any impacted residents.

Claire's number is 0429 160 674 or email info@gslw.com.au

First rains

It is important for residents in fire-affected areas or in areas where ash may have fallen on roofs to ensure that all rainwater from the first good rainfall event is not collected as this may be contaminated by ash.

Refilling your water tank

You may need to drain and refill your tank from a commercial water cartage company. Before you do, consider these points:

- is the tanker exclusively used for drinking water?
- has the water come from a scheme drinking water supply?
- has the water been treated with at least 1mg/L of chlorine while in transit?
- has the rainwater tank or any associated pipework been damaged by fire?
- has the rainwater tank been desludged and cleaned?

Further information

This information is from <https://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/Safety-and-first-aid/Bushfires-and-natural-disasters> or call the Environmental Health Directorate, Department of Health WA on (08) 9222 2000.

Any other information please contact the Environmental Health Officer at the Shire of Denmark on 9848 0300.