

**Washington Aqueduct's  
Temporary Conversion to Free Chlorine as the Distribution System Disinfectant  
Frequently Asked Questions - 2007**

**Q. What is Arlington County announcing?**

**A:** That our water supplier, the Washington Aqueduct Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, will perform a temporary conversion to free chlorine in order to disinfect the water distribution system.

**Q. Does the conversion process pose a health threat? Is the water safe to drink and use?**

**A:** The process is safe and residents may continue to drink and use their water as normal.

**Q. Will I need to do anything differently during the conversion?**

**A:** No action is necessary during the conversion. Residents may drink and use their water as normal.

**Q: Why is this conversion being done?**

**A:** Temporarily converting from chloramines to free chlorine is done to help control bacterial re-growth within the water distribution system. The County will be coordinating an annual hydrant flushing program to coincide with the disinfectant switch to further control water quality.

A biological film known as "biofilm" is found in all water pipes. Over time, biofilm becomes resistant to the chloramines it encounters regularly and as a result can cause water quality problems if it is not properly managed.

Switching to free chlorine for a short period of time shocks and weakens the biofilm, rendering it safe. The system-wide process of flushing the water mains through fire hydrants combined with the disinfectant change is proven to be effective at controlling biofilm.

**Q: How long will the conversion last?**

**A:** Approximately four weeks – April 7, 2007 through May 7, 2007.

**Q: Why is it being done now?**

**A:** Spring is the ideal season for flushing. During this time, the potential for hard freezing diminishes (thereby avoiding icy roads in the vicinity of hydrants) and demand for water supply is still low before the hotter summer months.

**Q: Is this the first time Arlington County has done a conversion?**

**A:** No. This is the fifth time. We temporarily converted to free chlorine each spring from 2001 through 2004 for exactly the same reasons.

**Q: Do other counties perform a conversion?**

**A:** Yes. This is a common industry practice. Many utilities throughout the country that use chloramines as a distribution system disinfectant convert to free chlorine annually. Regionally, Fairfax Water, the water supplier for Fairfax County as well as the City of Alexandria and parts of Loudoun and Prince William Counties convert annually.

**Q: How will it affect kidney dialysis procedures?**

**A:** The processes already in place to remove chloramines in the water will remove free chlorine. No change or adjustment is needed, and on May 7 we will switch back.

**Q: I have a fish tank. How will it affect my fish?**

**A:** The processes already in place to remove chloramines in the water will remove free chlorine. No change or adjustment is needed.

**Q: I do remember a public information campaign in 2000 when the utility converted to chloramine. In that message you talked about the need for dialysis centers and fish tank owners to prepare for the change. Why is this different?**

**A:** All methods for removing chloramines will also remove chlorine but the reverse is not true. Since affected parties adjusted for chloramines prior to the conversion in 2000, no adjustment is needed for this temporary conversion.

**Q: Is there anything I will notice during the conversion?**

**A:** You may notice a slight chlorine taste and smell to the water during this four-week period. This is normal and poses no health risk.

**Q. Who can I contact with additional questions or concerns?**

**A.** Please call the Water/Sewer/Streets Bureau at 703-228-6555.

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