

Frequently Asked Questions About Your Water Quality

Is the City of San Diego's tap water safe to drink? Should I use a filter?

The water delivered to your home is safe to drink. The City of San Diego's Public Utilities Department conducts regular water sampling and water quality testing throughout the distribution system on a weekly basis. This ensures that the water that is delivered to your home or business meets or exceeds all water quality requirements established by state and federal regulations. Occasionally, natural, non-harmful, algal blooms in our reservoirs may flavor the water. Carbon filters that are available from your local hardware store can be attached to your faucet to improve taste.

Should I use a water softener?

The City's water is already balanced and does not need a water softener. Although some customers appreciate the advantages of a water softener for softer skin and hair, water softeners remove natural minerals from the water, making it more corrosive to plumbing.

How much fluoride is in my drinking water?

Fluoride naturally occurs in our drinking water sources at low concentrations. The California Department of Public Health adopted regulations that establish standards for the addition of fluoride to drinking water. Thus, the City adjusts the level of fluoride in our drinking to 0.7 parts per million (ppm), the optimal level recommended by public health experts to help prevent tooth decay. Please see the City's annual Drinking Water Quality Reports at www.sandiego.gov/public-utilities/water-quality/water-quality-reports.

Will fluoridation affect my fish?

Fluoridated water does not negatively affect fish in aquaria or ponds. However, disinfectants such as chlorine or chloramine that are used to treat the City's water are harmful to fish. To determine how best to treat water used in aquaria and ponds, please consult an experienced fish care expert. Chlorine and chloramines in the City's drinking water are present in concentrations that are safe for humans and pets to drink.

What are the causes of bad taste and odor in the water?

Bacteria caused by the buildup of soap and food waste in your drain may produce gases that cause unpleasant odors when turning on your water. Pouring one cup of bleach down your drain and letting it sit for an hour is often an effective remedy for removing these odors from your drain. Naturally occurring algal blooms in our reservoirs can produce a compound called geosmin that has an earthy smell and flavor. These blooms may occur any time throughout the year, but are more typical in warmer summer months. Some people are more susceptible to detecting minuscule amounts of geosmin than others. Although the earthy taste and flavor may seem unpalatable, geosmin is not a health risk. To reduce the earthy flavor in your water, you can attach a carbon filter to your faucet. Carbon filters should be available at your local home improvement store. If odors persist, please contact the City of San Diego's Water Quality Hotline at 619-668-3232.

Why is the water coming from my faucet a milky or white color?

Milky or white water almost always occurs when tiny air bubbles become trapped in water. These air bubbles may occur for several reasons:

1. The water in the pipes coming into your house is under pressure. As water flows from a higher-pressure environment inside the water distribution system into the lower-pressure environment of your home, the pressure change may cause dissolved gases (air) in the water to bubble out.
2. When your water is turned off for repairs, air sometimes gets trapped in the water supply causing a milky or white cloudy color.
3. Colder water is better at holding dissolved gases (air) than warm water. During periods of warm weather, water in the distribution system warms slightly and air bubbles are naturally released, causing a white or milky color.

The milky white color in the water supply is usually short-lived and will dissipate over time. If the problem persists for more than 24 hours, please contact the City of San Diego's Water Quality Hotline at 619-668-3232.

Why is my water brown, orange or yellow in color?

A disturbance to a pipeline in the City's water distribution system (e.g., pipeline repair work) or a disturbance to your home's indoor plumbing (e.g., a broken water softener) may resuspend the sediments that naturally settle along the bottom of pipelines of all water systems. This resuspension of sediments typically results in light yellow to orange to dark brown water. If pipeline repair work is occurring in your neighborhood and you are experiencing brown, orange, or yellow water, wait for 24 hours after construction activities have ended. Then, open all your faucets and hose bibs to flush your interior plumbing until the water runs clear (this can take up to 15 minutes). If the water flowing from faucets inside your home is brown, orange, or yellow in color, but the water from your external hose bibs is clear, this may indicate a problem with interior piping or a broken water softener (if your home possesses one). Contact your plumber or water softener service provider for repair. If brown, orange or yellow water persists after continual flushing, please contact the City of San Diego's Water Quality Hotline at 619-668-3232.

Should I flush my home's interior plumbing after street construction in my neighborhood? If so, for how long should the flushing occur?

If street construction in your neighborhood has resulted in discolored water occurring in your home, wait 24 hours before beginning a flush of your home's interior plumbing. This will allow suspended sediments in the water distribution system to settle and for air that may have been trapped in the line to have been pushed out. Open all your faucets and hose bibs to flush your interior plumbing until the water runs clear (this can take up to 15 minutes). If you need direction on how to flush interior plumbing in your residence, please call the City of San Diego's Water Quality Hotline at 619-668-3232.

Why are there black particles in my water?

Black particles in your water are typically the result of the disintegration of rubber materials used in plumbing fixtures. Over time, rubber gaskets in your home's interior piping or water softener (if you possess one) break down, causing black materials to appear in your water. Please

have a professional plumber assess the issue. If it persists, please contact the City of San Diego's Water Quality Hotline at 619-668-3232.

Why does my water smell like chlorine?

To ensure the safety of your water, the City maintains a chlorine residual in the drinking water supply to prevent bacterial growth. Due to this chlorination, some customers' water may smell slightly chlorine. Chlorine is safe for humans at the concentration level used to treat the City's water.

Is my water safe from lead?

The City of San Diego's water distribution system does not contain lead pipes. For more information on your property's service line material, please visit www.sandiego.gov/public-utilities/water-quality/water-quality-in-your-home-or-business.

Can I see the data from the City's Water Quality Lab?

The City of San Diego's Public Utilities Department conducts extensive testing to ensure that our water is safe to drink and compliant with drinking water regulations. Much of this data is sent to your home annually in the City's annual Drinking Water Quality Report. Additionally, the results from our testing can be viewed online at www.sandiego.gov/public-utilities/water-quality/water-quality-reports.

If I have additional questions about my drinking water?

If you have additional questions or concerns about the quality of your water, please contact the City's Water Quality Lab at 619-668-3232 or DrinkingWaterQuality@sandiego.gov.

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