

Orange Water and Sewer Authority

A public, non-profit agency providing water, sewer and reclaimed water services to the Carrboro-Chapel Hill community.

NEWS RELEASE March 16, 2010

OWASA drinking water has chlorine taste and odor due to temporary change in disinfection

OWASA said Tuesday that its water will continue to have chlorine taste and odor in March and early April because the utility is using chlorine instead of chloramines for disinfection.

Chloramines are a compound of chlorine and ammonia which OWASA has used since 2002 for drinking water disinfection in months other than March.

OWASA asks customers to be aware of the following:

- OWASA crews releasing water from some fire hydrants in March. The purpose of this “flushing” of water mains is to ensure that water with chlorine goes through the entire water system.
- The flushing of water mains may cause some discoloration of OWASA drinking water because iron and manganese particles that have settled in water mains over time may be stirred up. Air bubbles, which can make water look milky, may also get into the water system. Customers who notice discoloration or air bubbles are encouraged to run cold water through a bathtub faucet, etc. for about 5 minutes to clear up the water.
- OWASA uses special equipment and a chemical to neutralize the chlorine and ammonia in the water that is released during flushing so that it will not harm fish in streams and creeks.
- Customers with fish or amphibians in aquariums filled with OWASA water should continue to use chemicals as recommended by pet supply stores, etc. to neutralize chlorine and ammonia.
- Customers who use OWASA water for special purposes or processes involving careful control of water characteristics, such as kidney dialysis, are encouraged to get advice from an appropriate technical source such as a filter vendor or service company about whether and how to make adjustments to their use or filtration of OWASA water during March. With chlorine disinfection in March, OWASA expects that the pH of its drinking water at the treatment plant will be 7.1 to 7.3, compared to the pH of 8.1 to 8.3 in months with chloramine disinfection.

OWASA will resume the use of chloramines for disinfection on April 1, 2010.

Customers are invited to contact OWASA with any questions or comments about the use of chlorine in March, the characteristics of OWASA drinking water, etc.

Background information regarding disinfection with chloramines

In January, 2002, OWASA began using chloramines to disinfect drinking water. Disinfection with chloramines has improved the taste and odor and the overall quality of drinking water by reducing the levels of certain disinfection byproducts (please see additional information below). Before 2002, OWASA used chlorine in the form of sodium hypochlorite (bleach) for disinfection.

OWASA made the change from chlorine to chloramine disinfection in 2002 in order to reduce the levels of certain disinfection byproducts which may be harmful at high levels over a lifetime. The disinfection byproducts, which result from the chemical reaction of chlorine with organic material, are called trihalomethanes (THMs) and haloacetic acids (HAAs). Small particles of organic material are naturally present in the water from lakes.

In the Triangle region, water utilities including OWASA, the City of Durham, the City of Raleigh and the Town of Cary use chloramines for disinfection except for one month of the year (March or a similar period), under normal conditions.

For more information, please contact:

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