

City of Seguin Water Department

Discolored Water Frequently Asked Questions

It's not a common occurrence but discolored water will sometimes appear at your home or work. There are several factors that can contribute to the issue, but discolored water typically originates in the water distribution system or private plumbing system. Discoloration or particles in the water are most commonly caused by corrosion or rusting of the interior surfaces of metal pipes. There are several possible situations that can cause this material to be dislodged. The most probable of these causes are listed below, along with the steps you can take to deal with a temporary problem.

- **Step One:** Determine the source of the discolored water- is it the hot or the cold water?
First try flushing the toilet then look in the bowl. Since toilets use only COLD water, if the bowl is clear, then the problem is with the hot water. If the bowl water is dirty, then the cold water is affected and activities outside your home should be considered as the cause. If the hot water is the source, the hot water tank must be flushed clean according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Prevent further accumulations of sediment in the hot water tank by not using the hot water. If the dishwasher or clothes washer is running, stop it mid cycle until the water is cleared up. If the cold water is the source, the cold water needs to be flushed.
- **Step Two:** Look outside.
If distribution system repair or maintenance is under way, this may be the cause. Also look for street sweepers or anyone else who may be using a fire hydrant.
- **Step Three:** Flush your plumbing.
Open the cold-water faucet in the bathtub all the way open, full force, with the drain open, for about 10 minutes. Most dirty water situations will clear up in this time. If not, turn the water off, wait 10-15 minutes, and repeat the flushing again.

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF DISCOLORED WATER

Main Breaks

Water is delivered to your home or business through a network of underground pipes referred to as the distribution system. The principal pipe or conduit is called a main. Water mains in this distribution system can fail due to age, corrosion, high pressure surges, defective materials, or damage by construction work. Fire hydrants can also be broken off by vehicles. When a main breaks, the increased velocity of the water can pick up dirt and other materials that normally settle to the bottom of the pipes.

Fires and Fire Hydrants

The high velocity of water used to fight fires and to test fire hydrants can pick up sediment as described under Main Breaks.

Construction Activities

Sometimes mains must be replaced or cleaned. Also, new buildings require connection to the existing water main. These and other similar activities may disturb the accumulated sediment and result in temporarily dirty water.

Dead Ends

Every distribution system has mains that must be ended due to physical obstructions (rivers, roads, etc.) or city design features (sports complexes, cul-de-sacs, etc.). This results in a "dead end" that does not connect back with another main. Low usage in these areas results in sediment accumulation. Over time the lack of circulation can result in the appearance of discolored, foul-tasting stale water.

Pipe Replacement

Replacements are done for various reasons, including to repair or avoid main breaks; replace corroded pipe; alleviate water quality problems; increase available hydrant fire flow; and improve overall area delivery.

Every improvement and replacement project is different due to the conditions at the project site. To inquire about a specific project, please contact the Seguin Water Department at 830-401-2404.

Once work begins to replace a pipe, it may be delayed or interrupted because the crew laying your main is responsible for emergency repairs of water-main breaks, should one occur elsewhere. If a crew is called away to repair a main break, they might be off the project site a period of time.

Note:

** The service line from the street-side shutoff to a residence or business is owned by the customer, and its repair and maintenance is the customer's responsibility.*

After the crews are gone

After a main repair, you may see discoloration in the water caused by small amounts of iron compounds flushing out of the system. These iron compounds are not hazardous, and you can clear up the discoloration by running the cold water for a few minutes. Sometimes, particles of iron can get into your aerators, causing a loss of water flow. If this happens, take off the aerator on a faucet. If you see hard particles in it, rinse them off and do any other aerators as well. Don't forget the shower head. You can avoid clogging issues by running the cold water in the bathtub or an outside spigot.

Is the water still safe for drinking?

At least 30 water samples are tested from various locations throughout the distribution system on a monthly basis. If a sample ever indicates a health concern, it must immediately be reported to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the public. Discolored water is usually only aesthetic (discoloration and metallic taste).

The Seguin Fire Department and Seguin Water Department flush hydrants to test their proper functioning for fire flows, but also periodically to freshen the water supply particularly where the water pipe acts as a "dead-end source."

For additional information please contact our office at 830-401-2404.

Note: *Discolored water in the bathtub (hot water only) may indicate a problem with the hot water tank, which is the responsibility of the consumer.*