

# Use of non-reticulated water in a food business

Food Act 2006

## Introduction

Food businesses must ensure the water they use for food related activities conducted at their premises is potable (safe for human consumption). This is especially important if the food business does not have access to a reticulated or town water supply. These activities include:

- washing food or ingredients
- cooking
- adding to food and drinks
- making ice
- cleaning of food contact surfaces
- cleaning of food containers and utensils
- personal hygiene.

## Non-reticulated water supplies

Non-reticulated water supply is any supply that is not piped to a business by a water utility or local government. Sources include:

- rainwater (e.g. tank water)
- ground water (e.g. bore water)
- surface water (e.g. river or lake) and
- trucked water (e.g. water carrier).

Water that is from a reticulated supply i.e. water which is piped to the business from a water utility or local government, that has had an interruption to service because of a water treatment plant breakdown, fire, flooding or other emergency, should be treated as water that is not guaranteed to be potable.

## Non-reticulated water supply risks

Hazards of non-reticulated water will depend on the source. Most non-reticulated water sources may contain microbiological contamination including viruses, bacteria such as *Campylobacter*, *E. coli* and *Salmonella* and parasites such as *Giardia* or *Cryptosporidium*. These harmful microorganisms, known as pathogens, are not visible to the naked eye.

Chemical contaminants in water are less likely than microbiological contaminants, but can be just as harmful if present in high enough concentrations. The types of chemicals that may be found in the water will be different depending on where the water is sourced, surrounding industries and land use and storage conditions.

## Legal requirements

The Australian New Zealand Food Standards Code, Food Safety Standard 3.2.3 – Food Premises and Equipment, requires food businesses to use potable water for activities conducted on the premises. Where businesses do not have access to a potable water source, they must be able to demonstrate that the water is safe to use. Non potable water may only be used when it will not affect food safety i.e. the washing of non-food contact surfaces such as floors.

## Water safety and suitability

If water is from a non-reticulated water supply, it is important to follow these basic guidelines:

- ensure water is collected from the most suitable and safest source available.

- determine what microbial or chemical contaminants are in the surrounding environments and what effects they may have on the water used in the food business. This may involve sending water for analysis prior to use to determine what treatments, if any, would be required.
- treat water if necessary to make it safe. This could involve the removal of solids, chemicals and microorganisms.
- ensure collection sources for rain water such as roofs and gutters are kept free of extraneous matter such as leaves and bird droppings.
- ensure a first flush system is used for all rain water collection to ensure that the first water collected during a rain fall event is discarded thereby reducing the amount of microorganisms entering the tank
- ensure tanks which are used to store water are cleaned out regularly to remove any build up of sludge or debris. This reduces the potential risks of chemical or microbiological contamination of the water.
- where water is supplied by a water carrier, it should be sourced from a potable water supply. The carrier should have hoses which are in good operating condition and are capable of being effectively cleaned and sanitised. The water carriers should only used for the purpose of carrying potable water, the operator should be able to provide documentation showing this. Some local governments request water carriers undergo a testing regime to ensure the quality of the water they carry, if so records of this testing may also be available.
- ensure all equipment that is used to collect and store the water is suitable and well maintained.
- ensure all equipment used in the collection and storage of water is well positioned to minimise the risk of contamination.
- ensure all water storage equipment is vermin proof.
- monitor the water regularly to ensure that the conditions of the water have not changed and any treatments being undertaken are appropriate to ensure its safety.

It is important to remember that some water sources such as bore water may have a very high mineral load. While this may not affect the safety of the water, it may affect the quality, flavour and hardness and have an undesirable effect on the equipment that is used in the food business.

## Food business responsibilities

It is the responsibility of a food business to ensure that all necessary steps are taken to provide safe water from non-reticulated or damaged reticulated supplies.

Where non-reticulated water is used, it is the responsibility of the food business to ensure appropriate safeguards are in place to ensure the safety of the water. It is recommended that water is tested by an accredited laboratory on a regular basis to ensure the steps that have been put in place are still adequate to maintain the safety of the water.

**Note:** This information is a general summary and cannot cover all situations. Food businesses are required to comply with all of the provisions of the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* and the *Food Act 2006*.

## For further information

Queensland Health has a variety of fact sheets with detailed information on food safety. Fact sheets can be accessed from the Queensland Health website at [www.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.health.qld.gov.au).

For further information on water supplies and food business requirements relating to water supply, please contact your relevant local government.

For advice on what constitutes good quality water see the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines available from [www.nhmrc.gov.au/files/nhmrc/publications/attachments/eh34\\_adwg\\_11\\_06.pdf](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files/nhmrc/publications/attachments/eh34_adwg_11_06.pdf).

For further advice on the management of rainwater tanks, refer to the enHealth document *Guidance on the use of Rainwater tanks* available from [www.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.health.qld.gov.au).