Disasters like blizzards, fires, and floods can damage your well or cause power outages and make your water unsafe to drink. Many problems are hard to see, and some can be very expensive to fix. The most common problem after a natural disaster is contamination of your well. This happens when something unsafe gets into the well water. Things that can be bad for your water include bacteria, salt, sewage, and chemicals (like gasoline). There might also be physical damage to the well or parts of your drinking water system. Your drinking water could become unsafe, or you might have no water at all.

This guide will help you know what to do in the event of an emergency.
General Rules to Follow During or After a Disaster or Emergency:

**Do**

- Test your water only at a certified lab. (see list below)
- When public officials say it is safe to go outside, check for damage to the well and other parts of your water system.
- Check the news on TV, radio, or internet for up-to-date information, or call your local emergency officials.
- Talk to your neighbors who also have private wells and share information.

**Do Not**

- Drink tap water if there is any chance that it might not be safe. Remember, you cannot see, smell, or taste some kinds of contamination.
- Bleach your well without following directions. You can cause chlorine poisoning, chemical burns, and damage to your water system. Also, you may not kill all the bacteria.
- Try to do any plumbing repairs yourself.

If something happens in your town, city, or neighborhood that you think may have affected your well, call your local officials or the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) Center for Drinking Water Quality. 401-222-6867

Contamination in Your Well

You cannot see, smell, or taste many things that might be in your well water, and some bacteria can cause health problems. You should use bottled water or water brought in by officials from a known, safe source if:

- Anything from the outside could have gotten into your well or parts of your water system;
- The area around your wellhead floods;
- Your pump stops working or your well overflows; or
- Septic systems or sewers in your neighborhood are damaged.

Use bottled water for drinking until a certified lab test shows that there are no health risks in your water. You may need to make repairs and bleach (or ‘shock’) the well before the water is safe to drink again. You may also need to replace any water filter cartridges in refrigerators or water pitchers that the untested water went through. For more information about different contaminants and a step-by-step guide to shocking your well, see our Tip Sheets online at www.riwelltesting.org

Ice makers, refrigerator filters, vending machines, and coffee machines do not kill bacteria or remove most contaminants. To check if an appliance can sanitize water (boil at 212°F for at least one minute to kill bacteria) or is certified to remove any contaminants, contact the manufacturer.

About My Well and Water

Date when someone last looked at, inspected, or checked the well and system parts:

Location of pump’s power switch:

Location where main water pipe and electric for pump enter the house:

Backup power:

Contact information for my well professional:

Local Emergency Contacts

Fire Department:

City Hall:

Other:

Rhode Island Department of Health
401-222-5960
health.ri.gov

Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency
401-946-9996
www.riema.ri.gov