OREGON CITY
Public Works - Operations
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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
ABOUT DRINKING WATER

I can taste and smell chlorine in the water. Why?

You may be sensitive to the taste and smell of the disinfectant. The amount of sodium hypochlorite varies throughout the distribution system, but it generally measures less than 1 part per million (ppm). This is well below the maximum residual disinfectant level, set by EPA, of 4 ppm.

Here are some suggestions for minimizing the taste and odor of chlorine:

- Fill a glass container with water and set it aside. Within an hour the chlorine will evaporate. Then cover the container and store it in the refrigerator.
- Mix the water in a blender. This will speed up the dissipation of the chlorine residual.
- Add one or two teaspoons of lemon juice to the water, then refrigerate.

Remember that if you plan to store drinking water after the chlorine residual has been removed, treat the water as you would a perishable food. Store it in clean, airtight containers and refrigerate.

Is there fluoride in Oregon City's drinking water?

No fluoride is added to Oregon City's drinking water. Naturally-occurring fluoride in the Clackamas River is generally less than 0.10 ppm (the detection limit for fluoride analysis). Check with your dentist to see if supplemental fluoride is recommended for your family.

Is Oregon City's water hard or soft?

Oregon City water is very soft. It averages about 25 parts per million, or about 1.5 grains per gallon.

What is the pH of Oregon City's tap water?

7.8 is the average pH of the water in the distribution system.

Why does the water have an "earthy, musty" smell and/or taste in late summer?

In late summer or early fall we can experience taste and odor issues in our drinking water. This is typically due to algae in the river.

All water providers who use the Clackamas River as a drinking water source have been tracking customer complaints for several years to see if there is a link between Blue Green Algal blooms in the North Fork Reservoir and taste and odor complaints, but there has not been a strong correlation. There are protocols set up to do additional sampling when water providers begin to receive taste and odor complaints. The lower river also experiences blooms of green algae that may be a contributor to these problems. There is no indication that these taste and odor issues are a health hazard.

The taste and odor can be lessened when a water treatment plant adds powdered activated carbon (PAC) to their treatment processes. Oregon City's drinking water is treated at the South Fork Water Board treatment plant. Currently it does not have the ability to add PAC for taste and odor treatment; the logistics of the plant will not support the addition of PAC to the treatment process without significant cost. Future plans call for additional filters, which combined with their existing filters, would provide enough surface area to change the filtration media to granular activated carbon (GAC) which would help with any taste and odor issues.

The earthy, musty taste and odor are, however, aesthetically unpleasant. Often the odor is more obvious when one is in the shower or washing dishes. Heating the water seems to exaggerate the odor.

Again, there is no indication of a health hazard connected with these events. Chilling the water before drinking can improve the taste. Generally the events are short-lived and disappear with cooler temperatures and fall rains.

Sometimes the water coming out of the faucet isn't clear. Why?

If your home or business has old galvanized pipes, they can give water a reddish-brown or yellowish appearance. It is most noticeable if the water has been sitting in the pipes for an extended period of time. Iron is the cause of this color. Discolored water rarely causes health problems. Flowing the water for a few minutes usually clears the discoloration.

Occasionally maintenance or firefighting activities can result in customers receiving discolored water, even when using best management practices to prevent it. Again, flushing the plumbing in your home is needed to replace the discolored water.

What is the best way to flush out discolored water?

Note: Refrain from using any hot water until the discoloration is gone. Also, tiny particles of debris may plug up faucet screens restricting the flow of water, so you may need to remove the screen heads before flushing inside lines.

- Flow the discolored water from your **cold** water taps only, starting with the outside hose bibs.
- Flush the closest hose bib to your water meter, then the farthest, before opening any faucets inside your home or business.
  Note: If you experience any sputtering of air with the water:
    - keep flushing the outside hose bibs first, then
    - find the cold-water faucet that is the highest point in your home (usually the bathroom shower head), and
    - flush it until no air is present.
- Flow water until the discolored water disappears from your outside hose bibs (this can take 15-25 minutes, depending on the length of your service line).
- Perform a similar process indoors – closest cold-water faucet to your water meter, then the farthest cold-water faucet from your water meter.
- Flow water from all cold-water taps inside and flush each toilet several times.

The hot-water line should also be flushed after all the cold-water lines are clean. Hot water lines shouldn't have as much discoloration or debris in the lines, so a quick flush before reinstalling the screen heads should do the trick!

If the water does not clear after complete flushing, contact Oregon City Public Works at 503.657.8241 to report the problem. We will clear things up as soon as possible.

The aerators on our faucets are filled with white debris. What is it?

"White chunks" or eggshell-like particles that clog faucet aerators and showerheads are actually pieces of plastic from hot water heaters that are experiencing dip tube failure.
The dip tube delivers cold water to the bottom of the hot water heater tank. Many dip tubes manufactured between 1993 and 1996 were found to be defective and, over time, have deteriorated. As the plastic dip tube breaks apart, pieces flow out of the tank through the hot water outlet and clog aerators and showerheads. These plastic pieces could be white or light green in color and if placed in a glass of water they will float. They are in no way toxic and will not make the water toxic. The defective dip tube can, however, affect the performance of your water heater.

There are two solutions to this problem. One is to flush all the dip tube debris from the heater tank, install a new dip tube, and then clean all the strainers and aerators. The second solution is to replace the water heater and then clean and flush the strainers and aerators. Contact a licensed plumber for additional information.