

## Wells and Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (Septic Systems) after a Wildfire

Your well or OWTS (septic system) could be adversely affected by fire, power outages, equipment failure, or contamination of water supplies.

### Private Wells/Water Systems

Perform a visual inspection of your well and other components which are part of your water supply system, including:

- Damage to electrical wires and wire connectors which supply power to your well
- Damage to above ground PVC plastic pipes used with the well to bring water to your house
- Damage to well houses and special equipment (chlorinators, filters, electronic controls)
- Damage to pressure tanks which could have been caused by exposure to excessive heat
- Damage to storage tanks, vents and over-flow pipes
- If you find damage to your well or water system, contact an appropriate contractor to repair the damage.
- If your water tastes or smells earthy, smoky or burnt, you may need to thoroughly flush your water lines.
- If your system has been damaged or if you are in doubt about the safety of your water, you may want to have your water tested. Contact the El Paso County Public Health, Environmental Health Division, or a certified lab regarding water testing.
- Each person in a household will need at least one gallon of water per day for drinking, cooking and general hygiene. If you suspect that your water supply may have been compromised during the fire, bring plenty of bottled water with you when returning to your home.
- **If you do not have water that you know is safe, it is possible to purify the water for drinking purposes. Start with the cleanest water you can find and treat it by one of the following methods:**

### Chemical Disinfection:

Treat the water with household-strength liquid chlorine bleach (do not use scented bleach products). Add bleach according to the table below, stir or shake; allow water to stand for 30 minutes before drinking.

| Amount of Water | Amount of bleach if water is clear | Amount of bleach if water is cloudy |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 gallon        | 1/8 tsp                            | 1/4 tsp                             |
| 5 gallons       | 1/2 tsp                            | 1 teaspoon                          |

**Boiling Water as Disinfection:**

Boil the water for 5 minutes. Once the water has cooled, it can be consumed, or stored in clean containers to use later.

- If you suspect that your well or water system has been contaminated, or if sampling indicates that bacterial contaminants are present, disinfection of your well is recommended. Contact El Paso County Public Health, Laboratory Services for instructions on proper well disinfection.

**Wastewater Systems:**

- If you are connected to an onsite wastewater treatment system (septic system), inspect your OWTS for damage:
- Damage to plastic piping above ground that may have been damaged by heat
- Raised systems scorched or damaged by fire
- Damage to piping where pipes enter the home/structure
- Disturbance of the soil treatment area by large vehicles such as firefighting equipment
- If your septic system has been damaged, backing up, or malfunctioning, discontinue use and contact El Paso County Public Health, Environmental Health Division, for guidance and instruction regarding repair and restoration of the system.

For additional information on private wells and onsite wastewater treatment systems, contact the El Paso County Public Health, Environmental Health Division, at 719-578-3199.

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