

Brown Water Causes and Solutions

Causes: We have two water supply systems in our building, one is the domestic supply that comes out of our taps every day and the other is for fire suppression that is only used during a fire or when we are required by the fire department to run tests. Our contractor performs our fire and sprinkler system inspections and then reports the findings to the City Fire Marshal.

Tacoma water is treated for pathogens but it is not and has never been filtered. Thus, sediment from the City's water source settles in the bottom of all the pipes in the City and in our building. Even though our two water supply systems are separate, our domestic water supply is disturbed when the contractor performs the required annual test and inspection on the fire suppression system. They flush thousands of gallons of water through our fire suppression system during the annual test (usually in Jan or early Feb). The force created by this huge flush test stirs up our domestic water supply and causes our domestic water to become murky brown sludge. When we know someone is going to work on either of our water supply systems we post a notice to advise you so you can avoid or limit your use of water on the day of the disruption. The brownish, murky water is not a health hazard but nobody wants to drink it or wash clothes in it. Since excessive sediment can damage the heating element in your hot water heater, it is especially advisable to avoid turning on the hot water tap until the sludge is settled and you are getting clear water from the cold water tap.

Sometimes we do not have advance warning of a brown water problem. For example, if a water main breaks or if the City is working on a water line near our property our water may be impacted. On these occasions, we post a notice as soon as we become aware of the problem.

Solutions: The process we recommend you follow when you notice this brown water problem. In the past, several residents turned on the cold water after the test was finished and let it run for hours in hopes of clearing the brown water problem. Letting your taps run constantly just keeps churning up the water and created a huge water bill that we all pay for in our dues. Overuse of water like this also drastically increases the surcharge we pay for sewer use.

Going Forward, please remember: If you observe brown sludge coming from your taps

- Stop using both hot and cold water immediately.
- Wait at least one hour, allowing time for the sludge to settle. If we posted a sign warning about a water disturbance, you can expect that the water will be murky for a minimum of one - two hours after the test is completed.

- Check the cold water by running it for ONLY 1 or 2 minutes then fill a glass with water and hold it up to the light to check for clarity. If the water is murky, wait another 30 – 60 minutes and check again using the same procedure. When the cold water is clear, the sludge has settled and you can use both hot and cold water.

If we did not post a notice, you can be sure the brown water problem is caused by a water main break or some other problem occurring outside our building. In that case, please call the City Water Quality Desk (253) 502-8207 or after hours: (253) 502-8384 for information. You can ask them to estimate when the problem may be resolved. Do not turn on your cold water and let it run, attempting to clear the lines, as this could take hours and waste thousands of gallons of water. Instead, run the cold water for 1 or 2 minutes, checking for clarity. If it is not clear, shut the water off and wait at least 30 minutes before checking again to see if it has settled yet. **If you do not need to use your water, the best thing to do is just leave it alone and allow it to settle.**

If you have further questions, please speak with a BOD member.