



# Using Rainwater After a Bushfire

The following information is provided to residents where rainwater tanks may have been contaminated either indirectly by ash, smoke, debris or directly by fire and fire fighting activities.

## How can I tell if my rainwater tank has been contaminated

Assume that your rainwater is contaminated if it:

- tastes or smells unusual,
- is cloudy,
- has an unusual colour,
- contains debris; or
- if the water level has changed (increased).

## Do Not Use Contaminated Rainwater for:

Drinking, prepare foods, making ice, washing, bathing or cleaning teeth (or watering animals) if:

- you think that your roof was inundated by fire suppressant water either dropped by aircraft or sprayed from ground units,
- your rainwater has become contaminated by ash,
- your rainwater tank has been burnt by fire and the internal lining material is damaged,
- if the plumbing to or from the tank is damaged.

until it is tested by a NATA accredited chemical laboratory.

## You Can Use Contaminated Rainwater for:

If you think that your rainwater tank has been contaminated by either of the ways mentioned above, you can still use the water to:

- flush toilets,
- water the garden;
- wash clothes (providing it will not stain clothes),
- wash cars, and
- fight fires.

Care should be exercised before using any contaminated rainwater to fill swimming pools or in evaporative air conditioners as ash and other debris may clog filters and pumps etc. Contact the manufacturer for more advice.

## Can I Treat Rainwater If It Has Been Contaminated:

No, it is extremely difficult and potentially expensive to effectively remove any contamination caused by fire suppressants or any other potentially harmful by products caused by ash from burnt bush, plastics and metals etc.



## First Rains

It is important for residents in fire affected areas or in areas where ash may have fallen on roofs to ensure that all rainwater from the first good rain fall event is not collected as this may be contaminated by ash.

## Water Testing

NATA accredited chemical laboratories may be found under "analysts" in the Yellow Pages telephone directory.

## Results Interpretation

To obtain more information about the results from any water testing, please contact the Water Quality Branch of the Health Department on 9388 4967.

## Refilling Your Rainwater Tank

You may need to drain and refill your tank from a commercial water cartage company. Before you do consider these points:

- Is the tanker exclusively used for drinking water?
- Has the water come from a scheme drinking water supply?
- Has the water been treated with at least 1mg/L of chlorine while in transit?
- Has the rainwater tank or any associated pipework been damaged by fire?
- Has the rainwater tank been de-sludged and cleaned?

## More Information

Additional Information may be obtained by contacting your Local Government Environmental Health Officer or by contacting the Water Quality Branch of the Health Department 9388 4999.

## Weblink

More information is available 24 hours a day by sending an email to [healthinfo@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:healthinfo@health.wa.gov.au). Type the following **key words** into the subject line to obtain the information you want:

**Bulk** - Code of Practice for the Bulk Cartage of Water .

**Country rainwater** - Country Rainwater Collection - pamphlet.

**Emergency** - Emergency Treatment of Drinking Water Supplies - pamphlet.

**Filter** - Water Filters - Pamphlet

**Signs** - Do not drink, Health Warning and Treat Before You Drink signs

**Urban rainwater** - Urban Rainwater Collection - pamphlet



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