Why are hydrants flushed?

Periodically, you will see Public Works personnel releasing water from hydrants. Hydrant flushing is necessary to test the hydrants to make sure adequate flow and pressure is available. Flushing is also done to remove sediment from the pipes in order to maintain water clarity and quality in the distribution pipes. When a worker fully opens a fire hydrant for the flushing process, the following are checked and recorded:
Visible and audible leaks
Proper operation of valve
Flushing out corrosion & rust
Water pressure & Flow of gallons per minute
Turbidity testing - tests amount of dirt in water
Color of the water
PH test of water in main - identifies a potential problem with waterline
Chlorine level before and after flushing - identifies organic contamination in line

If ignored, corrosion and rust can cause problems such as: severe rusty water, reduced water pressure or lower chlorine levels. Replacing water that has been standing in the system with fresh water is especially important in dead end main areas and low flow areas in the system

Is my water safe to drink after flushing?

Your water is safe to drink. Occasionally, water becomes discolored after hydrant flushing. If this happens, run your cold water tap for a few minutes until the water clears. If it doesn't clear the first time, wait a few minutes and run the water again. You should avoid washing clothes until the water clears.

Common Water Quality Complaints

A large percentage of the complaints received fall into one of the following areas:

Rusty Water

As described in the previous section, fire hydrants are periodically opened to flush water mains in the system. Additionally, Fire and Public Works Department personnel routinely use hydrants to make assessments as to whether adequate pressure and flow are available to satisfy normal system demands as well as the increased demand required in the event of a fire. These actions, as well as some construction activities, may result in brief periods during which you may observe moderate discoloration in your tap water.

Cloudy / Milky Water

In the late fall and winter months the water that enters your homes can be quite cold. When this cold water enters your home plumbing, it is exposed to significantly warmer temperatures. This causes dissolved oxygen, that can reach and significantly higher levels in colder water than in warmer water, to escape in the form of “micro-bubbles” that can give water a cloudy appearance. If a glass of this water is allowed to sit for a short period of time the cloudy effect will dissipate.

White Particles in the Water

It has been determined that a number of hot water heaters manufactured between 1993 and 1997 may have defective cold water supply dip-tubes. These tubes are designed to direct the cold water entering the heaters to the bottom, thereby forcing the previously heated water to the hot water outlet near the top of the tank. The defective dip tubes have been found to separate from the cold water inlet and, over time, disintegrate into minute pieces resembling crumbled eggshells. This material can readily clog sink aerators and showerheads but is said to be non-toxic.

Off-Taste

Over the years, numerous cases of off-taste complaints have been resolved favorably when customers have been advised to disconnect out-door garden hoses. Often these hoses, with nozzles attached, can be found in a collapsed condition. It appears that in these cases, the rubber-like or plastic-tasting water that had been in the hose could, under the right conditions, be pulled back into homes by partial vacuum pressure.