



Frequently Asked Questions – Fountaingrove Water Quality Advisory

Last revised 2/6/2018

What is benzene?

Benzene, a volatile organic chemical, is a clear, colorless aromatic liquid. It is highly flammable. It is formed through natural processes, such as forest fires. It is also formed from industrial processes. Benzene is also a natural part of crude oil, gasoline, and cigarette smoke.

Source: U.S. EPA

What are the uses for benzene?

The greatest use of benzene is as a building block for making plastics, rubber, resins and synthetic fabrics like nylon and polyester. Other uses include: as a solvent in printing, paints, dry cleaning, etc.

Source: U.S. EPA

What are the health risks associated with benzene?

Some people who drink water containing benzene in excess of the maximum contaminant level (MCL) for many years could experience anemia or a decrease in blood platelets, and may have an increased risk of getting cancer.

Source: U.S. EPA

What are the California Division of Drinking Water’s regulations for benzene?

Benzene is a regulated chemical with an established California State maximum contaminant level (MCL) in drinking water of 1 µg/L (microgram per liter) or 1.0 ppb (part per billion). MCL is defined as the highest level of contamination allowed in drinking water.

Benzene State Water Resources Control Board Regulatory and Water Quality Levels	Type	California State Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL)
	Concentration	1.0 ppb

Source: California State Water Resources Control Board



How will benzene be removed from my drinking water?

Santa Rosa Water’s scientists and engineers are investigating the cause and solutions to this problem. We are collaborating with experts at the University of California Berkeley, the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, and the California Division of Drinking Water.

How long until the do-not-drink/ do-not-boil water notice is lifted?

This is unknown at this time. Until Santa Rosa’s scientists and engineers determine the source of the contaminant and remove it, Santa Rosa Water will continue to have a drinking water advisory in place for the 13 homes in Fountaingrove.

What are my health risks if I live in the advisory area?

Santa Rosa Water has consulted with a toxicologist from the California Division of Drinking Water. Based on current benzene levels and the Do Not Drink notice there is likely no immediate risk associated with short term exposure to benzene and minimal risk for lifetime exposure (70 years).

What health and safety precautions should I take if I live in the advisory area?

Residents in the advisory area are advised not to consume tap water until further notice. This includes drinking, cooking, or brushing teeth.

In addition, we are advising residents to:

- Limit use of hot water
- Limit shower time (use lukewarm water and ventilate area)
- Use a dishwasher to wash dishes and use air dry setting
- Wash clothing in cold water
- Do not take baths
- Do not use hot tubs or swimming pools

Will the city continue to test and monitor the water in the affected area after the do-not-drink order is lifted?

Yes, the City will periodically test the affected area. The frequency will be determined by the results. The frequency will decrease when repeated samples result in non-detectable concentrations of benzene.



How do you know that this water quality issue is isolated in Fountaingrove?

Since the fires, Santa Rosa Water has increased water sampling beyond that required by regulatory requirements to closely monitor the entire water system. Repeated samples have shown no detectable concentrations of benzene outside of the advisory area. The water pipes in the Fountaingrove neighborhood were isolated by closing valves, to ensure that the contamination did not spread to other neighborhoods.

Have other areas been impacted with Water Quality issues?

Since the fires, Santa Rosa Water has increased water sampling beyond that required by regulations to closely monitor the entire water system and ensure high-quality drinking water for all residents. We have sampled all the zones outside of the isolated area and the samples show no detectable level of benzene. All other City neighborhoods outside of the water quality advisory area, including areas impacted by the fires, show no change in water quality.

Should I buy bottled water if I live in an area that was impacted by the fires, but is not in the water quality advisory area?

If you are not located within the Fountaingrove drinking water advisory area your water is safe to drink. We have sampled all the zones outside of the isolated advisory area and the samples show no detectable level of benzene. All other City neighborhoods, including areas impacted by the fires, show no change in water quality.

If the fires did not impact my home, is my water safe to drink?

Yes, drinking water in all other areas of Santa Rosa is safe. The only affected homes are those located in the Fountaingrove drinking water advisory area. Our water quality team is continuously monitoring and testing your drinking water supply to ensure it meets or exceeds all state and federal drinking water standards.

In addition, the Sonoma County Water Agency, which supplies a majority of our drinking water, is also actively monitoring the watershed for any potential changes in water quality. To date, the Water Agency has not seen any water quality issues associated with the wildfires.



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How will I know if my water is contaminated?

If water quality is compromised, Santa Rosa Water will notify you with a "Boil Water", "Do-Not-Drink" or a "Do-Not-Use" notice.

Residents in the Fountaingrove area have been notified via door tags and by City staff to Do-Not-Drink and Do-Not-Boil their water. Boiling the water will not remove the contamination.

What is being done to protect my drinking water source from the environmental impacts of the fire?

In collaboration with the U.S. Geological Survey and Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, the Sonoma County Water Agency has developed a water quality monitoring program to assess the potential impacts to the Water Agency's drinking water facilities resulting from the wildfires.

Data collected from this program will also be helpful in assessing potential impacts to other water supply systems within and downstream of the affected areas, as well as potential ecosystem effects.

To protect our drinking water system, multiple local agencies are working together to prevent fire-related debris, pollutants, and sediment from burned areas from being carried into our storm drains, creeks, and rivers.

Have more water quality questions? Call 707-543-3965 or email waterquality@srcity.org