

Emergency Preparedness



As I write this, the U.S. is in the wake of two natural disasters: the earthquake that rocked the East Coast on Aug. 23 and Hurricane Irene, which spun its way from the Carolinas to Canada just a few days later.

Many East Coast residents can consider themselves lucky. The earthquake was more of a surprise than anything else—according to reports, Hurricane Irene, weakening as it moved north, may have prompted evacuations and mass transit shutdowns, but it did not cause as much damage as was first feared.

Nonetheless, the quake rocked foundations and the hurricane's storm surge and heavy rains caused widespread flooding, raising concerns about the availability and safety of drinking water and bringing back memories of past disasters, like Hurricane Katrina, which made clean water supplies a source of major alarm.

According to the National Ground Water Assn. (NGWA), the quake could have affected well water supplies, causing turbidity. Flooding was the main concern, however. Many municipal treatment systems were affected by the flooding, resulting in widespread boil water alerts. NGWA also cautioned private well users against drinking well water if they experienced flooding, advising boiling water or using bottled water until a water treatment professional could assess water quality and fix any damage to the well.

In the event of a disaster, experts counsel that each person needs 1 gal of water per day, and recommend having a three-day supply on hand. This is often where bottled water comes into play, but a three-day supply can be hard to come by, as evidenced by grocery stores' empty bottled water aisles in the days before a storm. Attempting to resolve this problem, innovators have created devices that allow storage of water from other sources. Texas resident David Dodgen created one such product, the AquaPodKit, after seeing the effects of hurricanes on the Gulf Coast. The device allows residents to safely store up to 65 gal of water in a bathtub.

Events like recent earthquake and hurricanes remind us how important it is to have clean water for drinking, bathing and washing, and how easy it is to take our clean water supply for granted. They also help us remember the importance of being prepared.

Whether you live in a disaster-prone area or not—as we saw with the earthquake, natural disasters can pop up in unexpected areas—consider educating your customers on drinking water safety in times of emergency. Provide information on how flooding or another natural catastrophe could affect a well or treatment system, as well as recommendations on how much water to have on hand and instructions on properly boiling water to make it safe to drink. Armed with this information, customers will have the know-how to stay safe and avoid waterborne illness in the wake of an emergency. They also can rest assured that you will be ready to get their systems up and running when the storm has passed.

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