
Safely Re-Opening Buildings for Building Owners & Operators

FACT SHEET

COVID-19

The National response to the COVID-19 crisis has forced the prolonged closure or reduced occupancy of many buildings in our community. Now, as the province of British Columbia is beginning to lift restrictions, all building owners and operators should be aware of issues that could threaten the safety of the water and sewer services in their building.

CONCERNS

Buildings that are closed or have low occupancy for a prolonged period without active maintenance, have the potential for the water in the building to become stagnant, creating harmful microbiological and chemical contaminants which can grow or leach into water supply and can pose serious health risks. The effect of such stagnation will vary between each building based on factors such as length of the shutdown, size of the building, number of occupants, complexity of the system, integrity of the plumbing, and maintenance performed during the shutdown.

Some specific concerns to be aware of are:

- **Disinfection Depletion** – A water remains stagnant, the residual level of disinfectant (i.e. chlorine) depletes over time which provides an opportunity for harmful pathogens which can cause infections in persons through ingestion, inhalation and/or absorption into the skin.
- **Lead and Copper** - When water sits for any period in a pipe or fixture made from lead or copper, the water can absorb Lead that has leached from the pipe. Lead consumption is not safe and maximum acceptable concentrations (MAC) have been set in the Canada Drinking Water Guidelines.
- **Wear PPE** - In preparing a building for re-opening, staff should wear appropriate personal protective equipment such as gloves, masks and eye protection.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The **District of Summerland** responsibility is to provide clean, safe drinking water to each property.

Property owner's responsibility is to ensure it maintains the safety of that water within their building.

The **District of Summerland** and **Interior Health** are here to support and provide advice to building owners and operators. This fact sheet is intended to identify concerns, to list issues that should be considered and to provide reference information and more detailed guidance. These considerations should be addressed before allowing tenants and visitors to re-occupy any building that has been closed for a prolonged period.

RE-OPENING A BUILDING

- **Recommissioning** - Re-opening a building's water distribution system after extended closure. The aim is to restore the water quality to baseline conditions.
- **Flushing** – This is a more rigorous and extended flushing compared to regular maintenance. It is intended to not just replace the stagnant water but also dislodge sediment and biofilms.
- **Cleaning** – This is also a more rigorous process to clean fixtures such as taps, fountains, showers and connected food units, as well as any key components such as mixing valves and filters.
- **Shock Chlorination** – In some cases, you may need to consider disinfecting the system by circulating water with high concentrations of chlorine. But this need only be considered for complex systems with storage tanks or remote zones, buildings serving very vulnerable populations or buildings with a history of microbial issues.
 - Shocking should be conducted by a qualified water professional.
 - You need to know your various pipe materials (lead vs PVC) and understand how they react with various chemicals.
 - Warning - shock disinfection can potentially damage components such as devices, and filters. Manufacturers should be contacted before undertaking a shock disinfection.

RESOURCES

- **Interior Health** - [Interiorhealth.ca](http://interiorhealth.ca)
It is recommended that you check with your local public health authority for the applicable provincial regulations and guidelines.
- **District of Summerland** - www.districtofsummerland.ca
Assistance and direction may be sought from your water utility and/or Chief Building Inspector
- **Professional Associations**
Further resources are available from professional associations such as:
 - Canadian Water and Wastewater Association (CWWA) - www.cwwa.ca
 - American Water Works Association (AWWA) - www.awwa.org
 - Walkerton Clean Water Centre (WCWC) - <https://training.wcwc.ca/en/resources/>
 - Canadian Institute of Plumbing and Heating (CIPH) - www.ciph.com