

SANITISING BOTTLED WATER COOLERS

Bottled water can be an alternate source of clean, safe drinking water. Some work places and homes use water from 19L (5 USgal) jugs inverted on a bottled water cooler. When the bottle runs out another is placed on the cooler, usually by whoever is handy. **Health Canada** recommends cleaning and sanitising bottled water coolers **at each bottle change**. The following advice is meant to supplement, not replace, the manufacturer's instructions for maintaining your water cooler. If you have any questions, please contact an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) at your local Health Unit.



Cleaning Your Water Cooler

- Unplug cord from electrical outlet of cooler.
- Remove empty bottle.
- Drain water from stainless steel reservoir(s) through faucet(s).
- Prepare a disinfecting solution by adding 5 mL (1 teaspoon) *unscented* household bleach to 1 L (4 cups) of water. (This solution should contain > 100 ppm disinfectant.)
- Some companies suggest using one part vinegar to three parts water solution to clean the reservoir of scale before cleaning with bleach. Check your owner's manual.
- Wash reservoir thoroughly with bleach solution and let stand for not less than 2 minutes (to be effective) and not more than 5 minutes (to prevent corrosion).
- Drain bleach solution from reservoir through faucet(s).
- Rinse reservoir thoroughly with clean potable water, draining water through faucets, to remove traces of the bleach solution.

Drip Tray (located under water cooler faucets)

- Lift off drip tray.
- Remove the screen and wash both tray and screen in mild detergent.
- Rinse well in clean tap water and replace on cooler.

Replacing 19L Jug

- Wash hands with soap and warm water before handling.
- Wipe the top and neck of the new bottle with a paper towel dipped in *unscented* household bleach solution [$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp or 20 drops (1 mL) of bleach in 1 cup (250 mL) of water]. Rubbing alcohol may also be used, but must be completely evaporated before placing the bottle in the cooler.
- Remove cap from new bottle.
- Place new bottle on cooler.

For bottled water cooler units that have not been cleaned for some time, a longer soaking of the sanitizing solution in the cooler internals may be required. If your bottled water cooler also has an air filter for the air that bubbles into the bottle as you withdraw the water, these filters also require regular maintenance.

The reliability of the water dispensed from your bottled water cooler will benefit from a structured water cooler sanitising and maintenance program. Such a program should include (1) initial sanitising of all coolers, (2) continued maintenance of the coolers to manufacturer's instructions and Health Canada recommendations, (3) identifying each cooler with an ID number, (4) keeping a written cleaning log for each unit, (5) defined intervals for changing air filters, (6) bacterial sampling at an accredited lab on a defined frequency.

Bottled water is actually considered as a *food* for regulatory purposes and as with any food it is very important to be scrupulously clean in storage, handling and dispensing. It is a perishable product with a limited shelf life – the amount of stock in storage should be kept to a minimum. Bottled water does not contain any disinfectant residual to protect the bacterial quality of the water. You are responsible for ensuring the storage, handling and dispensing procedures will provide the high quality water you expect from your bottled water cooler.

Modified from: Scott, W.A. (2003). *Bottled Water Coolers - A Word of Cleaning*.