Guidance for Flushing Building Plumbing Systems after Prolonged Shutdown

Public water supplies remain safe and are not affected when your water meters are replaced. However, water that has been sitting in your pipes during a temporary shut-off can become stagnant. Flushing your system helps remove any particles and ensures your drinking water is fresh and meets the same high-quality standards as it leaves our treatment plants. These flushing practices are recommended for all types of properties, including homes, schools, daycares, lodging facilities, places of worship, event venues, retail locations, libraries, museums, restaurants, gyms, healthcare centers, and other facilities. To flush these systems, Hampton Roads utilities directors advise owners and property managers to follow the steps outlined below:

Flush cold water first

- Remove aerators and screens from all faucets. Then, turn on the cold water and open all cold-water outlet valves, such as faucets (bathroom, kitchen, and laundry) and bathtubs and showers. Outlets should be turned on to fully open.
- Start with the outlets on the lowest floor, then move to the second floor, and then higher floors in order.
- All cold-water outlets should be flowing at the same time during flushing.
- Flush toilets and urinals two or three times each, to purge any stagnant water and bring in fresh water.
- The outlets should run for at least 30 minutes. After this time has elapsed, turn off faucets and outlets in the same order as you opened them. Larger facilities will have more water stored in the pipes and tanks so it will take longer to flush the system.

Flush hot water second

- Turn on the hot water and open all hot water outlets, in the same way as you opened the cold-water outlets.
- The hot water should run for 45 minutes for a residence or small business, to ensure that all water in the heater is flushed out.
- After the time has elapsed, close the outlets in the same order as you opened them. Then, clean and replace all aerators and screens. Note: water heaters should be set to at least 120 degrees to prevent microorganisms from growing

Another best practice, especially for schools and daycare facilities, is the removal and thorough cleaning of end-point devices such as drinking fountain filters.

Additional information

- For more details and guidance for large businesses, check with The Environmental Science, Policy, and Research Institute and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention websites.

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