Emergency Water Preservation

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Last month, we discussed the importance of water during a regional disaster. Specifically, we must be able to access drinking water as a basis for our survival. Although the human body can go as long as three weeks without food, we cannot go more than three days without water. This month's article will focus on some specific skills needed to access drinking water beyond what we have already stored.

Although you may have 10 to 55 gallons of water currently stored, your home likely contains an additional 75-100 gallons of drinking water that can be used as long as proper steps are taken to not allow it to become contaminated. These steps are outlined below. You will need some basic tools to accomplish these tasks. These tools include a screwdriver, crescent wrench or pliers, or a readily available gas and water main shut off tool.

Shutting off your water main valve. Learning how to shut off your water main valve is critical for two reasons: doing so will prevent contaminated water from damaged municipal lines from entering your home system, and, learning how to shut your water main may prevent damage to your home in the event you have a pipe breakage within your home or property. You must first identify the location of the valve. This valve is located at the water meter on your property near the street. It can be identified by a concrete cover that measures approximately 12 in. x 18 in. (see Figure 1.)

Figure 1.

Removing this cover will expose the valve and water meter (see Figure 2). Note that the valve is located towards the street side of the water meter box. Using a wrench or earthquake utility tool, turning this valve 90 degrees will shut off the water supply to the home.
A video of this process can be watched at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jEp5wtQLmY

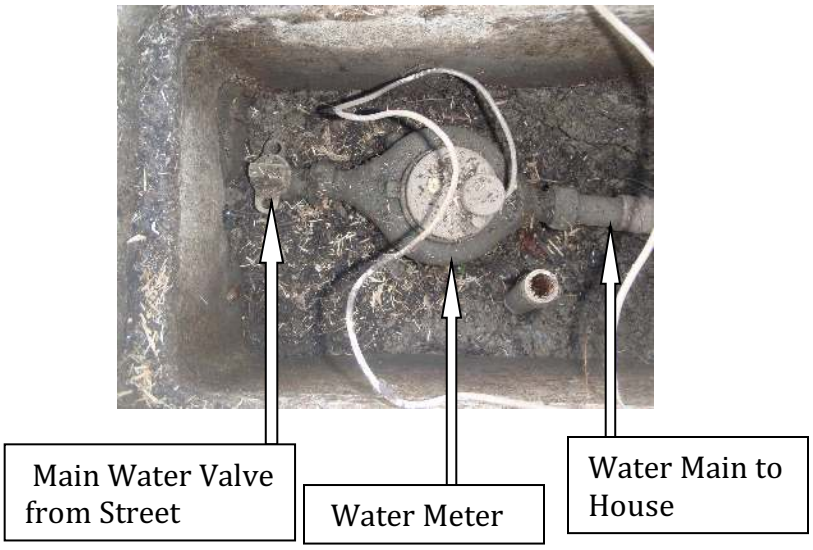

Figure 2.

Shutting off the gas main. Learning to shut off the gas is a critical skill, especially when you suspect structural damage to your home. It is best to shut off the gas at the main when you are unsure of possible damage. This is accomplished by identifying your gas meter, usually found at the side of the house, often near your electrical panel (see Figure 3.) The valve is located at the bottom of the gas line that comes up from the ground and enters the regulator and meter. Turning this valve 90 degrees will shut off the gas to the home. This can be confirmed by seeing no movement in the gas meter dial and hearing go gas pass through the regulator.
A video of this process can be watched at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPUh8UKX-ZQ

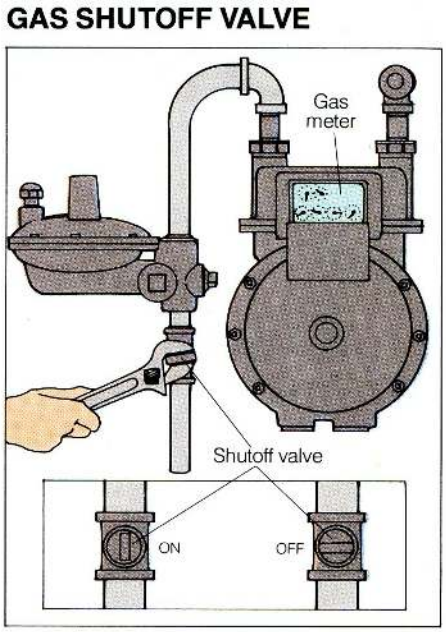

Figure 3.

Shutting off the gas water heater. If you are certain that there is no structural damage to the home, you may not need to shut off all the gas (and thus eliminating a potential resource for cooking) and may only need to turn off the hot water heater. This is accomplished by turning the top, smaller dial to the "off" position (see Figure 4, green arrow.) **This is very important** as it will prevent the water heater from heating up as you drain the water from the water tank. It is insufficient to turn the larger thermostat dial in front to "vacation" as this does not completely turn off the water heater.

Figure 4.

Once the water heater has cooled sufficiently, the water can be drained and used as drinking water by opening hose bib drain (see Figure 5) located near the bottom of the water heater. A screwdriver may be needed to turn this valve. You may also need to open a hot water faucet inside the house to break the vacuum and allow for the water to drain.

Figure 5.

Preventing sediment build up. As mentioned last month, the hard water found in South Orange County can lead to a build up of sediment. Although not harmful to one's health, the sediment can decrease the efficiency of the water heater function. As such, it is recommended that the sediment be removed by regularly draining the hot water heater. This is done by the following steps:

1. leave the water main on,
2. turn off the hot water heater as stated above,
3. attach a garden hose to the hose bib drain, and
4. open the valve allowing the water to flow out into the street (or yard, if sufficiently cooled).

This should be done at least once a year to prevent a build up of sediment.

The skills listed above will allow you to have access to additional drinking water in the event of an emergency. In addition, these skills can also help you lessen any damage that may have occurred to your home during a disaster. If you wish to learn more disaster preparedness skills, consider becoming a Block Captain as monthly courses are offered to our Block Captains and Area Coordinators. Contact us at emergencypreparedness@nelliegailranch.org.

Community News:

Emergency preparedness has taken on greater importance! Our Sheriff's Department is the agency that oversees county-wide disaster relief. In the event of a major disaster, it is the Orange County Sheriff's Department that would coordinate relief efforts to the citizens of Orange County. One of the candidates for Sheriff in this upcoming June election (and current Undersheriff for the department) has

made Emergency Preparedness one of his major tenets for the future of our county. This increased interest in Emergency Preparedness not only serves as justification for the work our Nellie Gail community has achieved in emergency planning, but with even greater support from the Sheriff's Department, our work will be further enhanced. Questions about how our sheriff's department will interact with our Nellie Gail Emergency Preparedness plan can be directed to kennethscheng@gmail.com.