

Interim Fire Rebuild Guidelines

How to Obtain a Water Availability Letter

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ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH



To rebuild a home damaged by a fire or natural disaster, you must obtain a Water Availability Letter from the Department of Public Health, Drinking Water Program. Homeowners may demonstrate that they have an adequate potable water source by meeting **one** of three conditions: service from a public water system, a water well on the property, or by obtaining potable water from a potable water hauler.

Water Supplied by a Public Water System

If your residence was supplied water by a public water system, you may obtain a Water Availability Letter by submitting either:

- A water utility bill from the water system showing service prior to the date of the fire or disaster.
- A “Will Serve Letter” from the water system on **their letterhead** indicating the water system has adequate water to provide service to the residence.

Water Supplied by a Domestic Well

If your property has a well, the **first step** is to determine if any of the components of the well were damaged by the fire or natural disaster. After assessing the damage and completing any repairs to the well or its components, prior to reconnecting the electrical wiring to the pump, submit an “**Application for Well Reuse**” to the **Drinking Water Program**. The Drinking Water Program will evaluate the application and issue approval to obtain a permit from Building and Safety to reconnect the pump to a power source. After reconnecting the pump, a well yield test may be necessary to determine whether water storage tanks are necessary.

Safety Assessment of a Potentially Damaged Well

- Inspect the wellhead and equipment for damage (well house, well casing, pump, electrical wiring and connectors, pressure tanks, piping, disinfection equipment, storage tanks, and slab).
- If the wellhead or equipment is damaged, have a licensed contractor inspect and complete repairs. If the well casing is damaged, the repair must be completed by a licensed well driller, and an “**Application for Well Permit**” is required. **Do not** reconnect electricity to the well pump at this time.
- Submit an “**Application for Well Reuse**” with pictures and self-assessment results after any repairs are completed.
- After approval of the “Application for Well Reuse”, obtain Building and Safety Permits for restoring electricity to the well, if necessary. Once electricity is restored, properly disinfect the well (see Well Disinfection Guidelines).
- Department of Public Health (DPH) recommends a total coliform bacteriological test by a certified lab to ensure all contamination has been removed.

Note: If the well is severely damaged, it must be properly destroyed and a new well should be constructed according to current CA Well Standards. Contact the **Drinking Water Program** at **(626) 430-5420** for additional information.

Determination of Whether a Water Storage Tank is Needed

DPH only requires the installation of a potable water tank if the well has a yield of less than 3 gallons per minute (gpm). A well with a yield from 2 gpm but < 3 gpm requires a potable water storage tank of 1,500 gallons.

If your property is in an area without service by a water utility and there are no fire hydrants present, the **Fire Department** will likely require a water tank for firefighting activities. The Fire Department is still determining whether they will allow domestic water to draw down the water required for fire suppression, or a tank that meets the size requirements of both the Fire Department and DPH. If a water tank is required, DPH recommends:

- Using a single tank for both potable water for domestic use and fire suppression water.
- Drawing water for domestic use from the top of the tank and fire suppression water from the bottom of the tank. The pipe for drawing domestic water should be set to draw only the top 1,500 or 5,000 gallons as required by the well yield results. This will prevent draw down of fire suppression water due to normal household water usage.
- Installing a low-level water alarm to provide an alert when domestic water is low.
- Adding a recirculation pump for large tanks to prevent water from becoming stagnant in the bottom of the tank. Stagnant water is more likely to grow bacteria and may develop an unpleasant taste.
- Using a disinfection system if you will be supplementing the tank with hauled water or using a large tank. Common disinfection systems use **chlorine, ultraviolet light, or reverse osmosis**.

You may be able to obtain information on the construction of your well from:

- **LA DPH-Environmental Health**
 - Phone: (323) 890-7806
 - E-mail: phicor@ph.lacounty.gov
- **California Department of Water Resources**
Requesting a well completion report by:
 - Phone: (818) 500-1645 X233
 - E-mail: waterdata@water.ca.gov
 - Searching www.water.ca.gov for well completion reports

Water Supplied by a Potable Water Hauler

The California Water Code, Section 106.4 prohibits the issuance of a building permit for new residential development where the water supply is transported by a water hauler. However, an exception is made for homeowners who are rebuilding a residence damaged or destroyed in a fire or natural disaster. To receive a Water Availability Letter, the homeowner must submit:

- Proof that a residence was previously legally constructed on the property. This can be met by providing copies of the original building permits from Building and Safety or through a printout of the Los Angeles County Assessor's parcel information, showing the property type as single family residential and an improvement.
- Proof that the residence was damaged or destroyed in a fire or natural disaster. This can be met by submitting a statement from the local Fire Department or your insurance company. If the damage was the result of a declared emergency, a statement from FEMA is also acceptable.
- Residence's original source of water and the source prior to the fire. If the residence was previously served by a well, the well must be repaired and returned to service, even if it provided less than 2 gpm prior to the fire or natural disaster. A variance may be granted if the homeowner can show that the groundwater level is consistently below the bottom of the well. If a variance is granted, the well must be destroyed in accordance with the California Well Standards. If hauled water was being used prior to the fire or natural disaster, provide copies of receipts or invoices from the water hauler showing service to the property.
- A copy of a service agreement will serve letter, or other written commitment from a licensed potable water hauler to provide service to the property.
- A Site Plan stamped by the DPH Onsite Wastewater Treatment Program detailing the location and dimensions of the residence, garage, accessory buildings, the onsite wastewater treatment system, any water storage tanks required to meet DPH or Fire Department requirements, access routes to the water storage tanks, and accessory equipment to operate the system.

Rebuilding Your Home

Contact your local **Building and Safety and Fire Department** for additional requirements regarding rebuilding your home.