Using Old Stored Water

Joseph Parish

I have encountered several people who have asked me about the safety of using water that they had previously stored up. They stated that they had previously stored treated water in multiple five-gallon jugs for a period of seven or eight years and was concerned over its usability. They were up in age thus it was not a simple task for this elderly woman to simply lift the jugs and replace them as frequently as she would like. Her concern was whether she could use the water in an emergency if she was to pour it into a Berkey water filtering system.

The Berkey Company claims that their filtering system can make any water drinkable. It stands to reason that if your water was drinkable when you put it into the containers it would be fairly safe to assume that it would likely be safe to drink after running it through the filter system. Look closely at your water to ensure that nothing like fungus or mold, etc is residing in it. If there is you will likely have to filter it first through some sort of sand filter to first remove the moss, algae, etc., followed by passing it through your water filter. This will extend the life of your installed filters if for no other reason. Those filters are rather costly to replace when necessary. Again, given her age and health she should start storing her water in more useable size containers that she is able to safely handle.

Again because of her age she would need to locate a friend or neighbor to lift and pour the gallon containers into the filter however I cannot see any problem using the water. Granted the water in its present form may not be especially safe to drink but the water filter should do the purification treatment very well. Why should you put that water into new containers when you can use what you have at your disposal? Use your current water containers or fill up new ones. I have several fifty-gallon plastic drums which I store water in. That gives me 100 gallons of water just in the drums.

I also have a deep well on my property so I do not foresee running out of water in a disaster. The on-site well is used as our main water source. Best of all it is free and well water is frequently viewed as clean and safe. We have not experienced any illnesses or sign of sickness which could have been caused by our well water. The water from our well is often considered clean by virtue of being taken directly from the ground. Although I feel my well is safe from contaminants, I take no unnecessary chances with the health and safety of my family. Of interest in this respect is what is commonly known as Coliform bacteria.

Coliform is a bacterium which is usually found in plants, animals and the soil. Humans do not usually contact an illness immediately with this bacterium but just its presence may indicate that there could be other harmful bacteria within the water. Coliform acts as an indicator that harmful bacteria could be in your well water. Water filters such as Berkey ensures me that my water supply is safe.

I use the Big Berkey water filter system on a daily basis. My countertop filter sits comfortably in a corner of our kitchen waiting for anyone to use. This 2.25-gallon water filter is an excellent way to prepare for emergencies. My Big Berkey will effectively remove Coliform bacteria if present as well as pathogens and parasites. It removes chemicals and unhealthy minerals such as lead and mercury. I am not a water drinker but I can consume a vast amount of water when it has been filtered through my Berkey and a slice of lemon inserted into the glass.

Problems encountered with too large of water containers is the reason that many people prefer to use 2-liter soda bottles or 1-gallon jugs. These are generally easier to use and to handle. Oftentimes, for elderly people who have encountered difficulty with their shoulders and elbows, the smaller 20 oz soda bottles may even be in order.

With that being said it is important to keep in mind that plastic has a tendency to leak. What this means is that any plastic containers are capable of leaking air, chlorine or the like, but not the water. Bacteria could likely enter the water through the plastic thus contaminating it. Even air itself can enter through the plastic walls of the jugs damaging any food or water which it contains.

The most common means of purifying water is by the use of chlorine but again this chemical will have a chance of dissipating in a sealed container. Either way I suggest that one have enough filtering capacity to cover at least 100,000 gallons of drinking water. By using personal filters, you could actually drink water from a nasty ditch by pre-filtering it with some cloth or a coffee filter (I keep thousands on hand) and then filter it with one of the smaller personal filters.

Now that we have covered the storage of water and the best way to filter it lets move on to several ways in which it can be disinfected. In the event that your water is in such bad shape that you cannot filter it properly than you are left with no choice but to disinfect it. Usually disasters like hurricanes and floods generally mean your water is basically undrinkable. The most common way that the authorities recommend cleaning up dangerous water supplies is by use of boiling. Boiling water will usually kill off most disease-causing microorganisms present. Unfortunately, boiling does not destroy contaminants like heavy metals, salts or other chemical contamination. According to the World Health Organization boiling water is a sufficient method of killing pathogenic bacteria, viruses or protozoa.

If the water that you have is cloudy allow it to settle and then filter it with a clean cloth, paper towel or as I do use a coffee filter. When boiling it, bring the water to a rolling boil for a minimum of one minute and continue to boil for a total of three minutes. After turning off the stove allow the water to cool naturally and place it in clean covered container. You can add a pinch of salt to the final product or inject some air in it by pouring it from one container to another. This process will get rid of the stale taste.

Water can also be disinfected by the addition of common household bleach. Use this method only if you are unable to boil the water. Use only the unscented bleach with

this method. You may discover upon reading the label that your bottle of bleach contains 6 or 8 percent sodium hypochlorite. This is the active ingredient in the bleach. Be sure not to use scented, color safe, or any bleach with cleaners added. Just as with the boiling method if the water appears cloudy let it settle and then filter it as mentioned above.

Next take a clean eye dropper from your medical supplies and using your liquid chlorine bleach which is at room temperatures insert some of the bleach into the water. You should not store your bleach for over a year as it will lose much of its effectiveness.

The following table will tell you how much bleach to use. We will assume that your bleach is an 8 percent solution. Double the bleach concentration if the water is cloudy, colored or is extremely cold. After adding the bleach stir the liquid well and let it rest for a period of 30 minutes. When sniffing the water, the smell should have a slight chlorine odor. If the water does not then repeat the dosage and let it site for another 15 minutes prior to use. If you find the chlorine taste is too strong simply pour the water from one clean container to another and allow it to site for a few hours prior to use.

Volume of Water	Amount of 8% Bleach to Add
1 quart/liter	2 drops
1 gallon	6 drops
2 gallons	12 drops (1/8 teaspoon)
4 gallons	1/4 teaspoon
8 gallons	1/2 teaspoon

Keep in mind that the bleach you purchase may be either 6 or 8% sodium hypochlorite.