



Does Potable Really Mean it is Safe? It Doesn't Sound Safe.

“Is your water potable?” That’s often one of the first questions boaters ask marinas when cruising Northern BC Coast, the Broughton Archipelago and sometimes even in the Gulf Islands. Boaters often find a ‘boil water’ notice or ‘not-potable’ sign at water spigots and hose-bibs on the docks. But what does this mean to boaters and why has this sign been posted?

What is not-potable water?

These notices indicate that the marina’s private water system has not been certified by the Health Department as a public water system. Establishing a water system as a certified public water supply is an extensive and costly process, often not justifiable at remote, small marinas. Sometimes it requires a process for purification and exposure to UV light to kill certain bacteria. Sometimes the water is good and just needs to be tested regularly and sent in for certification. Water from private water systems may or may not be tested regularly but is used routinely, and may have been used for years with no ill effects. Remote resort locations like Pierre’s Echo Bay Resort & Marina have been using the same well water for years with no ill effects. The hose bibs are marked non-potable and boil first, the water does have a slight brown tinge, but no one has reported problems with the water.

If other than owners are using or consuming water from a non-certified water system, the Government requires that a non-potable or boil notice be posted. The sign doesn’t mean that the water is bad, but rather serves to inform guest users of the water source and allow the guest user to make a choice or further inquiries.

As boaters, what do we do with this information?

Depending on your comfort level, there are several options for non-potable water:

1. Simply don't use the marina water, use only the water from your onboard tank.
2. Do your own checking – ask locals if they regularly use the water for household needs. After your evaluation, you may choose to use the local source.
3. Before your trip, you may wish to purchase a 3-stage water filter (the third stage needs to be a ceramic filter) and use this filter system to filter the marina water when filling your tank.
4. If you have a watermaker onboard, you may wish to use your own established procedures for making water and filling or re-filling your onboard tank.
5. Another option is to sanitize the marina water put in your tank with a chemical additive. You will need to research and purchase these additives before your trip.
6. Lastly, installing filters and a UV light sanitizing system to your onboard water system will ensure you have safe water no matter where you fill your water tank.

What is the brown color in the water?

Additionally, boaters may have discovered that a few water sources on Northern BC Coast and in the Broughtons have a slight tannin or brown color to the water. While the water may be potable and not harmful, it certainly can be unappealing. Nature has its own filtration system that sometimes picks up coloring from cedar roots which result in the weak tea appearance to the water. This is an isolated issue, and nearly all of the marinas and water sources in the area have clear water.

In summary, small outlying marinas provide a surprising number of amenities for boaters, including acceptable sources of water. During their short business season, it's amazing what they can and do provide for the boating community. We encourage boaters to let them know how much we appreciate their facilities.

~The Waggoner Cruising Guide Team



Our Water for the Waggoner Guide Summers on the Water ...

We take our water supply seriously. Just as serious as keeping our diesel fuel clean. Think about it. You probably have the typical system of 1-2 filters for your diesel fuel, you might want to do the same for your water.

Here is what we do. We place a chemical treatment in the tank at the beginning of the season and flush it all out, and then give a clean fill at our marina where we know we have good clean city water. This is part of our spring cleaning checklist. We use a clean white hose that is only used for filling the tank. It is a 50' flat hose on a reel that we only use for filling the water tank. On the fill side of the hose, we use a small RV KDF water filter to catch any sediment or other things in the water before they get in the boat's fresh water tank. We purchased the hose and filter at an RV supply store.

Next, we have a special **3M water filter** installed on a fresh water faucet in the galley sink. We swear by this system for our fresh water. In our tests, it takes out the brown in cedar tinged water. We replace the cartridges annually and they work. There are other freshwater systems from SeaGull and Shurflo that are good also.

Good clean water tastes good and makes great ice cubes.