

Volcanic Ash Advice: Drinking Water

What is Volcanic Ash?

Volcanic ash consists of tiny jagged pieces of rock and glass, and is highly abrasive, mildly corrosive, and conducts electricity when wet. It does not dissolve in water and can be spread over a large area by the wind.

Effects on water supplies

Freshly fallen volcanic ash may result in short term physical and chemical changes to water quality. It can cause contamination or clog and damage water supply equipment.

Home Supply

Small, open water supplies such as domestic water tanks with roof drainage are most at risk. Even small quantities of ash may cause problems for drinkability.

While the risk of toxicity is low, the pH may reduce or inhibit chlorination. Ash will usually make the water taste unpleasant (sour, metallic or bitter tasting) before it represents a health risk.

During and after ashfalls, there is the likelihood of extra water demand for clean-up, resulting in water shortages.

Recommended Actions

- Conserve water for human consumption
- If there is ash in your water, let it settle and then treat the clear water with bleach (1/2 teaspoon per 10 litres).
- Filter water if able
- Use brooms or shovels where possible, or non-drinkable water sources for clean-up
- Close water supply intakes, and disconnect drainpipes/downspouts from gutters to stop drains clogging. Allow ash and water to empty from gutters onto the ground.
- If there is a lot of ash in the water supply, do not use your dishwasher or washing machine.
- Monitor changes to water, including, pH, cloudiness, fluoride, if able

Detailed advice on ash impacts and preparedness can be found at the following websites:

Civil Defence websites

www.getthru.govt.nz

www.waikatoregioncdemg.govt.nz/Volcanic-eruption/

Information on volcanic ash provided by GNS Science and the US Geological Survey

www.volcanoes.usgs.gov/ash/

IVHHN - The International Volcanic Health Hazard Network www.ivhnh.org