

DRINKING WATER ON JBLM: FAQ'S

Directorate of Public Works



JBLM residents occasionally notice that their tap water has a brownish, yellow, or rusty color. The off color is often first noticed against a white background, such as a sink, bathtub, or toilet, and usually appears suddenly. In most areas of Joint Base Lewis-McChord, changes in water quality are localized and temporary, generally caused by some nearby activity.

Is discolored water safe to drink?

There is no indication that the discolored water is unsafe. However, in the event of an unusual episode of discolored water, JBLM recommends that residents avoid drinking the water until the appearance has returned to normal. It's also best to postpone doing laundry until the water has cleared up because the residue can stain clothing.

How can I get rid of discolored water?

The first step is to flush out the household plumbing. This is best accomplished by turning on several cold water taps and letting them run for 10 to 20 minutes. JBLM does not recommend running the hot water as it may result in pulling sediment into the water heater. If the problem doesn't clear up, wait about 30 minutes and flush the taps again.

What causes brown water?

'Brown' or discolored water is usually caused by deposits, sediment, or rust that may have accumulated in the water mains over time. Any activity that disturbs the pipes or results in a rapid change in water pressure can cause a temporary discoloration of the water. Such activities include water main repairs, construction, power outages, and opening or closing a fire hydrant or valve. Hydrants are routinely opened to flush a water main after repair, address a water quality problem, fill a street sweeper or other mobile tank, or to exercise the valves to ensure fire protection. JBLM crews try to flush water mains on a quarterly basis as part of our preventive maintenance program. The schedule for any planned flushing program is publicized in advance to alert residents to possible water quality effects in their neighborhood. Some parts of JBLM, especially older areas, are served by cast iron water mains that have become rusty over time. Many buildings have metal plumbing pipes and service lines. To correct this problem, corrosion-resistant pipes are now used in the distribution system when possible and older water mains will be upgraded as they are replaced. Building plumbing will be replaced on an as-needed basis.

Doesn't flushing the water mains and household plumbing waste water?

Although JBLM encourages responsible water use, achieving and maintaining good water quality must sometimes take precedence over conservation. Any water used beneficially is not truly wasted, and flushing water mains and home plumbing is sometimes necessary. At home, you can conserve by

flushing the taps into large containers and using the water for plants, or by using the sprinklers or garden hose to flush the pipes and water the lawn or garden at the same time.

If you are interested in learning more about your water service and water quality at JBLM, or have suggestions on how we could improve this report, please feel free to contact the Water Program Manager at JBLM Public Works Environmental Division at (253) 966-1780.

Questions?

Drinking water team: usarmy.jblm.id-readiness.list.dpw-water-program1@mail.mil.

Pretreatment team: usarmy.jblm.id-readiness.list.dpw-pretreatment1@mail.mil.

DPW is no longer distributing the annual Drinking Water Reports in bulk mailing to residents of JBLM; it is available on line through the housing website.

Interested parties can view the JBLM Lewis Main and McChord Field water quality reports online:

https://home.army.mil/lewis-mcchord/index.php/my-Joint-Base-Lewis-Mcchord/all-services/public_works-environmental_division/drinking_water.