

Hydrant Flushing Facts & Frequently Asked Questions

What is Hydrant Flushing?

Hydrant flushing is a release of water from fire hydrants. It's a controlled procedure that is vital to the general maintenance of the Village's water distribution system.

Why do Utilities flush hydrants?

Often Utilities flush to improve water clarity, appearance and quality by clearing settled iron and other minerals from the water mains (distribution pipes). By flushing a lot of water through the pipes, these settled minerals are stirred up and are flushed out of the mains. Iron and other minerals can temporarily look like tea colored water coming out of a hydrant, but the water is still safe to drink and use, however it may stain laundry. Hydrant flushing helps avoid random bouts of rusty water if there is a large demand for water, such as a major firefighting effort. Mains are also flushed to physically operate the hydrant called "exercising" and to inspect for hydrant maintenance needs.

How often do Utilities flush the mains?

It varies by the characteristics of each water system. Some utilities flush quite often, as much as monthly due to a high mineral content, stagnant water or for other reasons. Other systems like ours flush much less often because those types of problems are not an issue. Fortunately, in Howard we don't have much of an iron or mineral issue and only flush every two years. Primarily the Village flushes just to operate and inspect each hydrant and has much less to do with water quality issues. Hydrants are flushed in the Spring, typically during March and April.

How long does it take to flush and is there a schedule when crews will be in my area?

The Village has over 1,200 hydrants to flush and it takes quite a while to operate and inspect each hydrant. Typically flushing can take several weeks to over a month due to weather conditions, staffing levels and other scheduled work so it is very difficult to provide you with a date or time.

Why does the Village notify residents about flushing?

Sometimes as the churned-up water passes by your water service on the way to the hydrant, some discolored water can go up into the service line leading to your house if you have a faucet on or an appliance is drawing water. While low concentrations of minerals are harmless, it can discolor the water causing users concern about quality and/or stain clothes in the laundry machine. As mentioned above, Howard's water and pipes are quite clean so there is not much iron to flush out, but caution should still be exercised when running loads of laundry. You can do this by paying attention if water is actively being flushed on your street. If flushing is taking place, don't open the faucet or use water until the flushing is completed on your street. If you are not home and appliances aren't running at the time of flushing, it's unlikely that you will draw in any discolored water.

My water is discolored what do I do? Is the water safe to drink while flushing?

Yes, discolored water is safe to drink and use, however it may stain laundry. If your water is discolored, wait until flushing has subsided on your street then run a garden hose for 5 minutes, otherwise cold water tap 10 minutes, until the water runs clear. If you have a water softener and are experiencing discolored water, place the unit into “regeneration or cleaning mode” after hydrant flushing is completed in your area. Remember rust colored water is safe, but it may stain laundry.

My laundry is stained, what do I do now?

Keep the laundry wet and use an iron or stain removing product like “Iron Out” rust and stain remover. You can also obtain Iron Out at the Public Works Facility, 1336 Cornell Road, during normal business hours at no charge.

Tips for Minimizing Water Discoloration during Hydrant Flushing Operations on your Street

- If possible, limit your water use if flushing crews are flushing on your street.
- If you have discolored water, wait until flushing has subsided in your area then run a garden hose for 5 minutes or the cold water tap 10 minutes, until the water runs clear.
- If you have a water softener and are experiencing discolored water, place the unit into regeneration or cleaning mode after hydrant flushing is completed in your area.
- Remember rust colored water is safe, but it may stain laundry. If this happens, keep clothes wet and treat them with a product like Iron Out stain remover, which is available at the Public Works Facility, 1336 Cornell Road, at no charge.

What if I have other questions?

For more information, contact the Public Works Facility at 920-434-4060 and talk to the Utility Foreman Bill Thielke or email watersewer@villageofhoward.com

