fact sheet

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH FACT SHEET NO. 404

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE USE OF RAINWATER TANKS

This fact sheet provides information about the requirements for the use of rainwater tanks.

The installation or use of rainwater tanks does not require approval from the Department of Health (DoH) - Environmental Health Branch.

DoH generally supports the use of properly constructed and well-maintained rainwater tanks, as they can be an excellent supply of potable (safe & drinkable) water, especially in situations where reticulated water supply is of poor quality or production bores are of low yield.

There are also other matters that need to be taken into account when proposing to install rainwater tanks including the:

- viability of water harvesting in relation to tank volumes, roof size and average annual rainfall
- need for the installation of first flush devices to prevent contaminants being washed into the storage on the first rain
- provision of adequate insect screening to prevent mosquito breeding including the dengue mosquito *Aedes aegypti*, which occurred in Tennant Creek and is a container breeder, suited to rainwater tanks
- ongoing repairs and maintenance program for the life of the system.

DoH utilises the latest edition of the enHealth document entitled Guidance on use of rainwater tanks (2010) as the peak reference for issues associated with the collection of rainwater for potable purposes. These Guidelines can be downloaded from: http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-enhealth-raintank-cnt.htm

In essence, there are risks associated with the provision of safe potable water from rainwater tanks, particularly with respect to microbiological quality. The above guideline recommends that the very young, the very old and the immuno-compromised such as diabetics and cancer patients, disinfect rainwater from tanks prior to use for drinking or cooking purposes.

FOOD PREMISES

If the premises are registered as a Food Business in accordance with the *Food Act*, then the premises must have a potable water supply that complies with the NH&MRC Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (ADWG). Managers of some private water supplies (e.g. rainwater tanks or private bore), should have their water routinely analysed to ensure that their water is safe as part of their risk management routine.

The Australia New Zealand Food Safety Standards require every Food Business to be supplied with potable water, which is particularly relevant to premises utilising private water supplies. For the purpose of the annual Food Act registration it is now necessary for Food Business owners to demonstrate to DoH that they have a potable water supply. To this end it will be necessary for Food Business owners to arrange for a certified analysis of the water to confirm their water supply meets the requirements of the ADWG, i.e. an

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credible analysis of a kitchen tap sample showing “pass” in total coliform and *E. coli* as well as basic chemicals and metals.

For more information on the requirements for food businesses please refer to Fact Sheet 415: Food Business Water Samples.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
CONTACT ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ON 1800 095 646 OR YOUR LOCAL OFFICE

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