

## 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 and Families (DHF) - Environmental Health Program.

DHF 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.

DHF utilises the enHealth document entitled Guidance on use of rainwater tanks May 2004 as the peak reference for issues associated with the collection of rainwater for potable purposes. These Guidelines can be downloaded from the enHealth website > <http://enhealth.nphp.gov.au/council/pubs/ecpub.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 is 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. Managers of some private water supplies (e.g. rainwater tanks or private bore), as part of their risk management routine should have their water routinely analysed to ensure that their water is safe.

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 DHF 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 acceptable levels of bacteria, i.e. an annual credible analysis of a kitchen tap sample showing "pass" in total coliform, faecal coliform and E. coli.

To simplify this task, arrangements have been made with the NTG Water Microbiology Laboratories at Berrimah and Alice Springs to provide analytical services. They can be contacted on the numbers below to arrange the supply of prepared sample bottles and to book times for samples to be delivered. Note that the *Food Business* owner will need to meet the costs for the testing of samples.

- Alice Springs – Department of Primary Industries, Fisheries and Mines  
- located at Arid Zone Research Institute, phone (08) 8951 8110
- Darwin – Department of Primary Industries, Fisheries and Mines  
- located at Berrimah Farm, phone (08) 8999 2346

The results of analysis for your sample should be returned to the relevant local Environmental Health Office where the Food Business is located.

Please note that this is the minimum evidence to ensure that water is potable. Some private supplies will require further examination and will be visited by Environmental Health after the analysis is complete.

#### CONTACTS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Email: [envirohealth@nt.gov.au](mailto:envirohealth@nt.gov.au)

	<b>Darwin Urban</b>	<b>Darwin Rural</b>	<b>Katherine</b>	<b>Katherine West Health Board</b>
Ph.	8922 7377	8922 7481	8973 9062	8971 9315
		8922 7483	8973 9061	
Fax.	8922 7036	8922 7036	8973 9063	8972 1233
	<b>East Arnhem</b>	<b>Barkly</b>	<b>Alice Springs</b>	<b>Tiwi Islands</b>
Ph.	8987 0440	8962 4302	8955 6122	8922 8198
	8987 0441			
Fax.	8987 0444	8962 4420	8952 5927	8922 7979