

Anjuman A. Islam, Ph.D.
Water Utility Director

Nathaniel Tillis
Wastewater Utility Director



Joel Brunner
Plant Superintendent

Chad W. Regalia, P.E.
Chief Engineer

Seasonal Taste & Odor Frequently Asked Questions

Is my water safe to drink?

Yes. Racine's drinking water continues to meet all state and federal drinking water standards and is safe for drinking, cooking, and bathing.

Why does my water taste or smell different?

Naturally occurring compounds in Lake Michigan can occasionally affect the taste and odor of drinking water. While research indicates that climate change is increasing the likelihood of these events, seasonal lake conditions and other environmental factors determine when they occur and how noticeable they become.

What causes the taste and odor?

The taste and odor are caused by naturally occurring compounds called geosmin and MIB (2-methylisoborneol). These compounds are produced by certain algae and other naturally occurring organisms in the lake. While they can affect the taste and smell of the water, they are not harmful at the levels found in drinking water.

Is this unique to Racine?

No. Seasonal taste and odor events can affect water systems that draw from lakes and reservoirs, including Lake Michigan. The severity and timing can vary from community to community depending on local conditions.

Why are neighboring utilities not experiencing the same issue?

Although neighboring communities also draw their drinking water from Lake Michigan, each utility has a different water intake location, treatment process, and operating conditions. Seasonal lake conditions can vary over relatively short distances, meaning one community may notice taste and odor issues while another does not. Utilities also use different treatment methods, which can affect how noticeable these naturally occurring compounds are to customers.

Why can I smell or taste it if it's safe?

People can detect these compounds at extremely low concentrations—far below levels that pose any health concern. Some individuals are more sensitive than others and may notice the taste or odor even when others do not.

What is Racine Water Utility doing about it?

The utility is actively responding by:

- Working with engineering experts and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to implement activated carbon treatment designed to reduce taste and odor.
- Monitoring lake conditions and testing water throughout the summer.
- Increasing hydrant flushing in areas with the most customer concerns to move fresher treated water through the system.
- Adjusting treatment operations as conditions change.

Will the taste and odor go away?

Yes. These events are typically seasonal and improve as lake conditions change. The utility will continue monitoring conditions and adjusting treatment to minimize impacts.

What can I do at home?

You may find these tips helpful:

- Refrigerate tap water before drinking.
- Let the cold water run briefly before filling a glass.
- Use cold water for drinking and cooking.

Should I use bottled water instead?

No. Bottled water is not necessary because Racine's drinking water remains safe and meets all drinking water standards.

Where can I get updates?

Racine Water Utility will continue to monitor conditions and provide updates as additional information becomes available.