

Taste and Odor

The City of Lawrence obtains raw water from two sources: the Kansas River and Clinton Reservoir. Lawrence water customers have experienced taste and odor episodes. The drinking water can have an earthy, musty taste and odor and the duration depends on the levels of algae or bacteria growth in the source water. The drinking water can have an unpleasant taste and odor, but it is only an aesthetic problem. Taste and odor episodes do not interfere with the quality of water and pose no known health effects to persons who drink it.

Taste-and-odor compounds can be detected by humans at extremely low concentrations. Although these compounds are not considered a health hazard, the water may still be aesthetically unacceptable to the consumer.

Disagreeable tastes and odors are produced during the decay of algae and other aquatic plants, as well as during their growth.

A water utility that has never experienced taste-and-odor problems is rare. The City of Lawrence uses powdered activated carbon to treat the water because it can be applied on demand at dosages tailored to the intensity of the problem.

Completely successful treatment of all taste-and-odor problems is not possible in all cases. Changing water quality and unknown factors may make conventional treatment ineffective and necessitate the need for new treatment methods. Monitoring programs and systems that aid in predicting water quality problems may assist in identifying some changing conditions, but it may not be possible to accurately diagnose all taste-and-odor problems as they occur.

Episodes of taste and odor in public water supplies are not unusual. Taste and odor problems are the result of environmental and seasonal changes in the water supply, which include those produced by microscopic organisms, notably algae and bacteria. Sometimes in water supplies, taste and odor problems can be a challenge to treat. These situations tend to intensify in slow-moving rivers and in reservoirs where there may be more time available for taste and odor causing organisms to grow. Fast-flowing rivers may not be subject to large accumulations of algae and bacteria, but can be vulnerable to other types of discharges that cause taste and odor.

The City of Lawrence, Utilities Department staff monitors the source water at the Kansas River and Clinton Reservoir and continues to take appropriate measures to anticipate and control episodes of taste and odor. We work diligently to provide the customers we serve with an adequate supply of clean and safe drinking water.