TOWN OF HILLSBOROUGH

Q&A: Pink Residue on Utility Fixtures

Below are questions and answers regarding pink residue that may be found around utility fixtures.

Is the pink residue on my fixtures caused by the town's water?
This residue is likely the result of airborne bacteria that thrive in moist environments. It does not generally indicate a problem with water quality. If you have questions concerning your water quality, call the Hillsborough Water Treatment Plant at 919-296-9640.

What is the pink residue on my fixtures and other surfaces?
A pink to reddish film or residue on bathroom and kitchen surfaces is likely the result of airborne bacteria in the home that produce a pinkish or dark gray film on routinely moist surfaces, such as toilet bowls, showerheads, sink drains and tiles. The bacterium is likely *Serratia marcescens*, which is found naturally in soil, food and animals. It produces a characteristic red pigment and thrives on moisture, dust and phosphates, such as soap and shampoo residue. The bacteria have been tied to urinary tract infections, wound infections and respiratory problems in some people.

When does this residue occur on fixtures and other surfaces?
The residue often appears during or after construction or remodeling, when dust and dirt containing the bacteria *Serratia marcescens* are stirred up. Once the bacteria are airborne, they will seek a moist location where they can grow rapidly. Some people have reported that the residue only appears during certain times of the year, especially when windows are left open for most of the day. The bacterium is present in a number of environments, and wind can carry it or can stir up dust in which it is present. The pink residue's appearance can be intensified by using activated carbon filters, which remove chlorine from water. The absence of normal levels of chlorine in tap water allows *Serratia marcescens* to thrive. Because chlorine naturally dissipates from water that is allowed to collect on surfaces, *Serratia marcescens* may grow rapidly in these areas.

How do I get rid of this residue on fixtures and other surfaces?
The best solution is to continually clean the involved surfaces to keep them free from bacteria. Chlorine-based compounds work best. However, keep in mind that abrasive cleaners may scratch fixtures, making them more susceptible to bacterial growth. Chlorine bleach can be used periodically to disinfect toilets and to help eliminate the occurrence of pink residue. By keeping bathtubs and sinks wiped down and dry, the formation of this residue can be avoided. Cleaning these surfaces with solution that contains chlorine will help minimize the residue's occurrence.