



Septic Systems - What to Do After a Flood

Where can I find information on my septic system?

Please contact Environmental Health Services to find out if we have records or plans for your septic system. If there are no records, contact a licensed septic system contractor to determine the location of your septic tank and dispersal field.

Do I pump my tank during flooded or saturated drainfield conditions?

Pumping the tank is a temporary solution. Bear in mind that under worst conditions, pumping it out could cause the tank to try to float out of the ground and may damage the inlet and outlet pipes. The best solution is to reduce water use in the house and therefore the wastewater flow to the septic system.

What do I do with my septic system after the flood?

Once floodwaters have receded, there are several things homeowners should remember:

- If you are on your own well, do not drink well water until it is tested by a certified laboratory. A list of certified laboratories in the area is available on the EHS website
- Have your septic tank professionally inspected and serviced as soon as possible after the flood. Signs of damage include settling or an inability to accept water. Most septic tanks are not damaged by flooding since they are below ground and completely covered. However, septic tanks and pump chambers can fill with silt and debris, and must be professionally cleaned. If the soil absorption field is clogged with silt, a new system may have to be installed.
- Only trained and licensed specialists should clean or repair septic tanks because tanks may contain dangerous gases. Pump the septic system as soon as possible after the flood. Be sure to pump both the tank and lift station if one is used. This will remove silt and debris that may have washed into the system. Do not pump the tank during flooded or saturated dispersal field conditions. Do not compact the soil over the soil absorption field by driving or operating equipment in the area. Saturated soil is especially susceptible to compaction, which can reduce the soil absorption field's ability to treat wastewater and lead to system failure.

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- Examine all electrical connections for damage before restoring electricity.
- Be sure the septic tank's manhole cover and risers (if used) are secure and that inspection ports have not been blocked or damaged.
- Check the vegetation over your septic tank and soil absorption field. Repair erosion damage and sod or reseed areas as necessary to provide turf grass cover.

In General: Use common sense. If possible, do not use the system if the soil is saturated and flooded. The wastewater will not be treated and will become a source of pollution and a public health hazard. Have the system inspected and serviced by a qualified professional as soon as practical after the flooding has passed. Conserve as much water as possible while the system restores itself or is repaired.

Contact Environmental Health Services at 681-4900 or 346-8460 if you have any questions.