



FLOODING – SEPTIC SYSTEMS

Once floodwaters recede, homeowners with septic systems should remember several things:

- Do not drink well water until it is tested.
- If possible, do not use the system if the soil is saturated and flooded. Flooded septic systems do not treat the wastewater, and untreated wastewater becomes pollution. Conserve water while the system restores itself and the water table falls.
- Have your septic tank professionally inspected and serviced if you suspect damage. Signs of damage include settling or an inability to accept water. Since most septic tanks are below ground and completely covered, they are not damaged by flooding. However, septic tanks and pump chambers must be professionally cleaned since they can fill with silt and debris. If silt clogs the soil absorption field, a new system may have to be installed.
- If sewage has backed up into the basement, clean the area and disinfect the floor. Use a chlorine solution of a half cup of chlorine bleach to each gallon of water to disinfect the area thoroughly.
- Pump the septic system as soon as possible after the flood. Be sure to pump both the tank and lift station to remove silt and debris that may have washed into the system. Do not pump the tank during flooded or saturated drain field conditions. At best, pumping the tank is only a temporary solution. Under worst conditions, pumping it out could cause the tank to float out of the ground, damaging the inlet and outlet pipes.
- Do not compact the soil over the soil absorption field by driving or operating equipment. Saturated soil is especially susceptible to compaction. Compaction reduces the soil absorption field's ability to treat wastewater, leading to system failure.
- Examine all electrical connections for damage before restoring electricity.
- Be sure the septic tank's manhole cover is secure and that inspection ports are not blocked or damaged.
- Check the vegetation over your septic tank and soil absorption field. Repair erosion damage. Sod or reseed areas as necessary to provide turf grass cover.

Adapted from:

"Environmental Protection Agency's Fact Sheets for "Emergency Disinfection of Drinking Water and What to Do After the Flood," August 2006.