

Septic Systems and Flooding

Heavy rains, severe flooding, or other types of emergency events could damage sewer systems and cause an overflow of untreated wastewater into communities and the environment. Always avoid contact with any floodwater that may be contaminated with sewage.

A well-maintained and constructed septic system will better withstand flooding. Regular inspection is necessary to ensure proper functioning. During floods, the ground can become saturated, preventing proper operation of the system. For example, a septic tank can collapse or float out of position. Signs that a septic system is not working properly include:

1. Sinks and/or toilets drain slowly
2. Floor drains overflow
3. Sewage becomes visible on the ground outside the home

Before a Flood

To prepare your septic system before a flood or other emergency event:

1. Seal the manhole and/or inspection ports to keep excess water out of the septic tank.
2. Ensure your septic tank is at least half-full to prevent it from collapsing or floating.
3. If your septic system requires electricity:
 - a. Turn off the pump at the circuit box before the area floods, and
 - b. Waterproof all electrical connections to avoid electrical shock or damage to wiring, pumps, and the electrical system.

During a Flood

1. During a flood reduce the amount of water used by limiting toilet flushing, dishwashing, washing clothes, and showering.
2. Avoid contact with any standing water that may contain sewage.

After a Flood

1. After waters have receded, check the system for broken lines or surfacing sewage.
2. Correct any problems before using the system.
3. Avoid contact with any septic system electrical devices until they are dry and clean.
4. Do not pump out the septic tank more than halfway or the tank may float out of the ground.
5. Reduce all nonessential water use, including dishwashing, washing clothes, and showering.
6. Flush toilets as little as possible or use a temporary toilet.

If you suspect septic system damage, get the system professionally inspected and serviced. Contact our Division for permitting assistance.

Grounded in Health