

SEPTIC SYSTEMS AND FLOODS

Easy steps can be taken to mitigate both the affect the flood waters has on a septic system and the affect the septic system may have on public health and the environment. This fact sheet will discuss recommendations for a homeowner before, during and after a flood event and list what is required of septic systems located in a floodplain.

FLOODING EVENTS

A homeowner can take these steps with a septic system to mitigate damage to the system and the dwelling before, during, and after a flood:

BEFORE A FLOOD

- Install a polyethylene sheet over any below grade drains, such as a floor drain, shower drain, etc. Place a sandbag over the poly sheet. This may prevent sewage from rising flood waters from backing up into the dwelling during the flood event.
- DO NOT pump the contents of the septic system. Pumping the tanks prior to a flood event could create the tanks to become buoyant with the rising groundwater and cause them to pop out of the ground.
- Locate and protect the soil treatment area (drainfield, mound, etc.) from compaction by keeping all traffic off the area.

DURING A FLOOD

- It is required to discontinue discharging wastewater to the system. All water use in the dwelling must cease during the flood.
- If the septic system has a pump tank, the circuit that controls the pump must be disconnected. Otherwise, the pump will run continuously during the flood or create an electrical hazard.

AFTER A FLOOD

- Conduct a visual inspection of the system to determine if any damage has occurred to the system. This could include physical damage to the system's components (tanks, drop boxes, pumps, etc.) and damage to the vegetation over the septic tank and soil treatment area. Make sure to check the septic tank and pump tank's manhole covers are secure and that inspection pipes have not been damaged or blocked.
- Check electrical connections for damage or wear before turning the electricity back on.
- Contact a licensed septic system Maintainer to have all septic tanks and pump tanks pumped to remove any silt and sand that may have entered the tanks. This should occur as soon as possible after the flood recedes and prior to resuming use of the system.
- Contact a licensed septic system installer to make any necessary repairs to the system that may have occurred during the flood.
- Repair erosion damage by sodding or reseeding as necessary to provide a good vegetative cover.