



WHAT TO DO AFTER A FLOOD

Private Septic Systems

[Private septic system information.](#)

- Contact the County Health Department for Guidance.
- Visit the Department of Public Health's Environmental Health (EH) [Onsite Sewage](#) webpage.

Do not pump the septic tank when it is flooded or under saturated drainfield conditions.

- Pumping the tank is only a temporary solution.
- Pumping the tank could cause it to float out of the ground, resulting in damage.

Actions to take while the septic system is flooded:

- Reducing water usage is best.
- Use emergency [waste disposal methods](#).
 - Use bucket latrines with disposable bags.
 - Contract a portable toilet from an approved vendor and have it serviced regularly.
- Plug basement floor drains.

Once floodwaters have receded:

- Do not use the septic system until the soil has dried sufficiently to allow water to flow into it without causing damage.
- Inspect the septic tank and have it serviced if you suspect damage.
 - Signs of damage include soil settling or an inability to accept water.
 - Most septic tanks are not damaged by flooding since they are below ground.
 - Septic tanks, lift stations, or dosing tanks can become clogged with silt and debris, requiring professional cleaning.
 - If the drainfield has been saturated with silt, a new system may have to be installed.
 - State-approved contractors should pump or repair private septic systems.
 - Visit the EH [Onsite Sewage](#) webpage or the County EH website for a list of septic system contractors that work in the area, or call the [County EH Office](#).

WARNING!

DO NOT PUMP THE TANK WHILE FLOODED

- Pumping the tank while the ground is saturated could:
 - Cause the tank to float out of the ground.
 - Cause damage to pipe connections from the house and to the drainfield.
- Pumping the tank is only a temporary solution.
- Allow time for the drainfield to return to its normal function.

KNOW THE TANK AND DRAINFIELD LOCATIONS

- It is important to identify where the tank and drainfield lines are located to prevent damage from heavy trucks driving over the septic system for home repair.
- Contact the County Health Office to get a schematic from the original inspection report.

- Clean and disinfect sewage spill-affected areas using a chlorine-based solution of ½ cup of chlorine bleach per 1 gallon of water.
 - Avoid adding floodwaters to the septic system during cleanup.
- Pump the septic tank as soon as possible after the soils dry out.
 - Some septic systems may have a lift station and/or a dosing tank that should also be pumped out. This will remove silt and debris that may have washed into the system.
 - Pumping removes solids and fluid from the tank, resulting in less fluid flowing into the drainfield. This allows the drainfield to return to its normal, pre-flood function, provided the tank refills.
 - Do not pump the system while flooded or under saturated conditions.
 - Pumping out a buried septic tank under saturated conditions may cause it to float out of the ground, damaging the inlet and outlet pipes.
- Do not compact the soil over the drainfield by driving or operating equipment in the area.
 - Saturated soil is susceptible to compaction, which can reduce the drainfield's ability to absorb and treat wastewater, possibly leading to system failure.
- If applicable, an electrical contractor should be used to check for electrical damage before power is restored to the system.
- Check to ensure the septic tank's access lid is secure and inspection ports are not blocked.
- Repair any erosion damage over the system with sod or reseed to provide turf grass cover.

Business wastewater spill cleanup may require extra precautions.

- Take extra precautions to prevent skin, eye, and inhalation contact with chemicals in the wastewater spill.
- Proper clean-up depends on the chemicals found in the wastewater.

Private Well Water Systems after a flood:

- Do not drink well water until it is tested.
- Refer to the "[What to do after a flood – Well Water guidance](#)" fact sheet or contact the [County Environmental Health Office](#).

Source: <https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/septic-systems-what-do-after-flood>