



What to do With Your Septic System in Flooding Conditions

Before the flood...

1. Make sure you have a properly working system and the tank(s) and drainfield are well maintained.
2. Keep stormwater runoff away from septic tank and drainfield area as much as possible.
3. Check and fix leaky plumbing fixtures.
4. If the building sewer has a backwater valve, verify that it is properly working. If the backwater valve is a manual valve, ensure it is shut.
5. If you do not have a backwater valve, you may want to check both chambers of the septic tank to determine if any sewage needs to be pumped out. DO NOT completely pump out the tank if flooding or saturated conditions are expected. An empty tank may float.
6. Make plans to significantly reduce your water use during the actual flooding event.

What can I do if I am in an area prone to flooding?

- Make sure your system is properly maintained.
- Ensure all inspection access openings (i.e., cleanout caps, covers, hatches) are securely in place and sealed to prevent surface water inflow.

During the flood: If your system is covered with water...

1. AVOID use of the septic system (e.g., reduce the number of times the toilet is flushed). Turn off water softening units. Do not use the washing machine or dishwasher. Do not pump water from sump pit into your septic system. Shut off power to the septic system's electrical devices (pumps, alarms, etc.).
2. You may observe that water may flow slower out of drains and toilets. You may also experience water backing up in drains serving floors located below the ground surface (e.g., basement, cellar).
3. If you have a drinking water well that is flooded, the well water may be contaminated. Contact your local health department or a certified well contractor with questions about testing.

After the flood waters have receded...



1. DO NOT use the septic system until water over the septic tank and drainfield areas is no longer evident on the ground surface.
2. If the system is damaged and in need of repair, contact your local health department. Signs of damage to your system include:
 - a. Soil settling around tanks and in the disposal field area.
 - b. Wastewater system components have shifted (are not level) or floated (partially or completely) to the ground surface.
 - c. System not accepting wastewater, such as sewage backups or sewage surfacing on top of the ground.
3. Have your septic system inspected by a certified wastewater system inspector <https://ncowcicb.info/>.
 - a. Examine the electrical system (e.g., includes electrical connections, pumps, alarms, etc.) for damage before restoring power to the system. If your system requires an operator, check with them before operating the system.
 - b. Clean the effluent filter/screen.
 - c. The system may need to be serviced and/or pumped out to remove solids, sediment, or debris. When having the tanks pumped out, make sure to pump out both chambers.
 - d. Make sure all tank access covers are in place and secure. Check any system inspection or sampling ports/locations for damage and blockage.
 - e. Do not turn on water softening units, use the washing machine or use the dishwasher until the septic system has been determined to be operating properly.
 - f. Check for erosion at the tank and drainfield areas. Replace or repair vegetative cover as needed.
4. DO NOT compact the soils in the drainfield area. Keep vehicles and heavy equipment from driving over the drainfield area. DO NOT place dumpsters, trailers, or building materials over the wastewater system.
5. If you have had sewage backup into the facility, use rubber gloves, boots, and eye protection to clean and disinfect any impacted areas. Discard any items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected in an approved manner.
6. DO NOT dump flood waters or disinfectants into the wastewater system.

Contact your local health department if you have questions, concerns or are in need of additional advice or assistance. You may also contact the On-Site Water Protection Branch at 919-707-5854.



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