

# GUIDANCE FOR SEPTIC SYSTEMS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER A FLOOD

## STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO PROTECT YOUR HEALTH AND SEPTIC SYSTEM

### Safety Reminders

- Get help from a septic system service professional for steps with this symbol .
- Steps with a  only apply to pressure distribution systems.
- Get help from a septic system service professional if any of the steps feel unsafe in your situation or your system loses power.
- Make sure power to the septic system is off before inspecting the area.
- Be careful walking near a damaged system.
- Wait to enter damaged structures until they are cleared by a trained inspector.
- Wear gloves and eye protection when inspecting your septic system.
- Never enter the pump chamber or septic tank.

- **Make sure the land around the manhole covers is sloped downwards** away from the septic system.
- **Turn off electricity to the system** at the circuit breaker.
-  **Turn off your pump at the circuit box** if you have a pressure distribution or mound system.
- **After the power is off, waterproof all electrical connections.**
- **Plug all drains in the basement.**
- **Reduce water use** in the house.
-  **Seal the manhole and inspection ports if possible** to keep out excess water.

### During the Flood

- **Follow emergency and evacuation advice** for your area.
- **Eliminate all non-essential water use** and flush toilets as little as possible if evacuation is not needed.
- **If the drain field becomes covered with water, do not use the system** and avoid contact with any standing water that may contain sewage.
- **Try to find other toilets if your septic system is damaged.** If there are not toilets available, see the guidance on temporary toilets below.

### Before the Flood

Take these steps to reduce the effects of an impending flood on your septic system.

- Maintain your septic system.
- **Know your septic system and take pictures or keep documents of the following** to reference later if there is damage:
  - Septic tank location.
  - Septic system records or drawings.
  - Electrical components.

### After the Flood

**Consult with a septic system service professional and follow the steps below.**

- **Rope off your septic system.** There is danger of collapse for septic tanks.
- **Stay out of the area if sewage backs up.** If the entire building is contaminated, abandon the building until all affected areas have been cleaned.
- **If the septic system is above the flood point:**
  - **Have the tank pumped** by a permitted liquid waste hauler/pumper.

- **Temporarily use the septic system as a holding tank.**
- **Do not have the septic tank pumped under flooded conditions.** Pumping it out could cause the tank to float out of the ground. Recently installed systems may pop out of the ground.
- **Avoid using the system and do not dig around the septic tank** while the soil is flooded.
- **Reduce water use** until the system is inspected:
  - **Avoid sending basement sump pump water into the septic system.**
  - **Re-route water from roof gutters** away from the drain field area.
  - **Take short showers.**
  - **Limit laundry and dishwashing.**
  - **Turn off the water** while brushing teeth, shaving, or rinsing dishes.
  - **Do not flush the toilet** each time it's used for liquid waste
- 🔧 **If you have a pressure distribution system and your pump was not removed,** a septic system service professional will need to inspect and repair the pump.

## 🔧 Professional System Inspection

**Contact a septic system service professional for an inspection before using the septic system again.**

An inspection may include the following:

- Open all parts of the system and see if debris entered the system. All sewage tanks should be pumped and cleaned out.
- Check the tanks for water tightness and structural defects.
- Make sure that inspection ports are free of blockage and damage. Replace and secure septic tank manhole covers as needed.
- Check the drain field and the area over the septic tank for depressions and damage from fallen debris. Repair with sod or seeding to provide good plant cover.

- Make sure wastewater moves between the parts of the system as intended.
- About a month after the system is restarted, schedule a follow-up visit to check for proper operation.

## OTHER SYSTEMS

*If you have an advanced treatment unit or any other type of onsite wastewater treatment system not addressed above, contact a septic system service professional or your local health department.*

## Temporary Toilets

**Only use a temporary toilet if there are no functioning toilets available and the flood is expected to last several days.**

- **Check to see if you can stay somewhere else.**
- **Contract a PortaPotty for temporary use.**
- **Modify your own toilet:**
  - **Shut off the water valve** to the toilet. If you can't close it, try another option.
  - **Flush out any water still in the bowl.**
  - **Line your toilet bowl** (under the seat) with a plastic kitchen garbage bag inside of another kitchen bag.
  - **Into the inner bag, put some kitty litter, dry peat moss, lime, or something similar** that will absorb liquid.
  - **Do not mix urine and fecal material** if possible.
  - **After using the toilet, close the inner plastic bag** with a plastic tie or other method.
  - **Wash or sanitize your hands** after toilet use and waste handling.
  - **Store full bags in a secure area.** Consider a watertight bucket or trashcan.
  - **Dispose of the bags when possible.**
- **Use a five-gallon bucket as a toilet.** You can add a toilet seat and set it up like a modified toilet (above).
- **If you must dig a hole for your waste, make sure it's at least 200 feet** (70 adult steps) from water bodies and at least six inches deep. Fill it in after a single use, tamp the dirt down. This is a short-term option only and regulations may vary by jurisdiction.