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**Septic Systems (On-site Wastewater Treatment Systems) After Flooding**

Purpose: To assist homeowners and small businesses with on-site wastewater treatment systems (OWTS), also known as septic systems, following flooding of the system.

The septic system includes the tank and a soil treatment area, also known as the leach field or drain field. Flooding may have impacted the septic tank, the soil treatment area, or both.

Care must be taken when bringing a septic system back into service following a flood event. The information below is provided to assist with the process of safely bringing your system back on-line. As difficult as it may be, be patient to give your septic system time to "dry out." Not only does the water above the ground surface need to drain away, but the level of water in the ground needs to drop before a septic system can be used.

If your on-site wastewater treatment system was not flooded but experienced heavy rain that saturated the soil, use as little water as possible until your system dries out. Ways to assist with drying out the septic system location is to route water from roof gutters away from the system and make sure any sump pumps in the home are not directed to the septic system.

As soon as possible, mark the location of the septic tank and the soil treatment area (leachfield, drainfield) to keep traffic, even foot traffic, off the system to prevent damage and soil compaction.

Make sure that all electric power is off to pumps, aeration or treatment systems, etc. Have an electrical contractor or an installer trained about your system check out the electrical components for damage and watertightness prior to restoring power to the system.

Don't allow wastewater to go to the septic system until the system has recovered. This can mean no baths, laundry, or toilet flushing. Large quantities of disinfectant can kill the good bacteria in the on-site system, so don't put water with disinfectants from flood clean up down the drain.

The septic tank and pump tank, if you have one, should be pumped and inspected before resuming use of the on-site wastewater treatment system, because silt, debris and other contaminants may have entered the tank. These can cause problems for the soil treatment area. After the tank has been pumped, inspect the inlet and outlet tees or baffles for blockages caused by debris or fats and grease from the tank.

**BUT**, don't rush to pump the septic tank until the groundwater level has dropped. Empty tanks, including concrete tanks, have less weight and thus are more buoyant. They can "porpoise" out of the ground or at least move/shift. Additionally, if plastic or fiberglass tanks are pumped under high water conditions, these tanks can collapse or be crushed by the pressure of the surrounding soil and water forcing costly replacement of the tank. This can break pipe connections and electrical connections. If the groundwater level is part way up the side of the septic tank, it may be necessary to only partially pump the tank the first time. It is also possible that water from the soil treatment area will flow back into the tank, so the tank would need to be pumped more than once.

Additional information is available at: http://water.epa.gov/drink/emerprep/flood/septicsystems.cfm

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