

Managing Your Septic System in a Flood

Flooding can have various impacts on your home's septic system (on-site wastewater system). Floodwater can damage the system's physical structure, preventing wastewater from being treated properly. Floodwater can also overwhelm wastewater systems and cause wastewater to back up into your home.

What should I do if my wastewater system was impacted by the flood?

- **If you have experienced flood-related damage to your septic system** (on-site wastewater system), [contact your regional engineer](#) for support. Department of Environmental Conservation technical staff are available to provide support to the homeowner, licensed designer and excavating contractor.
- **If your septic system pump or other electric controls are malfunctioning** or inoperable, call an electrician to service the controls. Contact a licensed wastewater system designer to assess impacts to your septic system.
- **Stay away from floodwaters**, and any puddles or flowing water that may have been impacted by wastewater, which can expose you to potentially harmful bacteria, viruses, and/or chemicals. Avoid contact with any outdoor items exposed to the water until you have cleaned them and washed your hands thoroughly. This includes, but is not limited to, children's toys and gardening tools left outside during the flooding event.
- **Inspect your septic system.** Once surface water and groundwater return to normal levels and wastewater pumpers are able to return to full operation, your wastewater system should be inspected and if necessary pumped. Call your wastewater service provider or local wastewater hauler and put your name on their list to be inspected or serviced once conditions allow.

What should I do if wastewater has backed up into my home?

If wastewater has backed up into your home, please leave the property until the floodwaters have receded. Once it is safe to return:

- **Remove wastewater from your home.** Small amounts of wastewater should be collected in buckets and put into the wastewater system once it is back in service. Large amounts of wastewater should be removed by a septic tank pumper. If a septic pumper is not available, [contact your local regional engineer](#) for guidance.
- **Clean the area** exposed to wastewater and either disinfect or discard items as follows:
 - Avoid direct skin contact with wastewater and be particularly careful of your face and eyes.
 - Always wear protective rubber gloves, eyewear, and boots, and be especially careful if you have cuts or open sores; wearing rain gear is also advisable.
 - Assume everything touched by wastewater is contaminated.
 - Clean, disinfect or discard everything wastewater has touched.
 - Disinfection can be performed using a mixture of a half cup of chlorine bleach per gallon of water. Surfaces should be washed with mild soap and rinsed after disinfecting.
 - Wash, disinfect, or discard any clothing or supplies used in the cleanup immediately after use.

How can I reduce stress on my system during and after a flood event?

Conserving water can alleviate stress on your wastewater system, helping to reduce the chance of system failure and/or wastewater backing up into your home.

Here are some simple steps to reduce your water use and help your septic system recover from the flood, if your water supply is operable and safe to use:

- Take shorter showers and lower the level in the tub.
- Match the water level to the size of the load of laundry and hold off doing laundry if possible.
- Run the dishwasher with full loads only.
- Turn the water off when brushing teeth, washing hands, and doing dishes.
- Check for and fix any leaks.

[Check out more water conservation tips.](#)

Who do I contact with additional questions about my failed system?

For assistance with your failed wastewater system, check out Information for Landowners and Designers or [contact your regional engineer.](#)