



Flooding and private sewer and septic systems

A septic system is designed to filter wastewater normally discharged from a residence or business not served by public sewer services.. When excess water from rain or flooding is added to the system, its ability to handle household wastewater becomes severely limited. Resultant sewage backing up into a building can pose serious cause health hazards to inhabitants.

Below are some steps you can take before and after flooding to minimize the impact on your septic system and on your health.

Limit stress to the septic system before, during, and after flooding

1. Make sure the septic tank is sealed around the lid and around all openings.
2. Plug all floor drains and plumbing fixtures in the basement to prevent wastewater from backing up into the house.
3. Reduce water usage in the house. Some suggested ways include:
 - a. Check faucets, shower heads, toilets, sinks and any other water using devices for leaks, and repair them as soon as possible.
 - b. Don't discharge water from a basement sump pump into the septic system.
 - c. Don't let water from roof gutters discharge into the drainfield area.
 - d. During flood events, reduce the number of times you flush the toilet , and.
 - e. Reduce the number of showers and baths. (A good rule of thumb might be one bath/shower every other day per person.), and
 - f. Don't use the dishwasher or garbage disposal. Don't wash clothing. Instead, take it to a public laundry, if possible.

If your septic system has backed up due to flooding:

- Always wear rubber gloves, and protective clothing when in contact with the sewage
- Wash your hands and any body part exposed to the sewage with soap and uncontaminated water after exposure
- Do not try to fix it yourself.
- Do not allow children or pregnant women to come in contact with the sewage.
- Do not attempt to add wastewater to an already flooded septic system. Wastewater can be collected in a portable toilet container and retained for future disposal into a working septic system or public sewer access.
- Once the floodwaters have receded, call the health department at 498-6775 for instructions on how to disinfect your home.

**For more information on water and sewer issues during flooding, see
<http://www.nesc.wvu.edu/subpages/emergency.cfm>**