



Returning Flooded Septic Systems to Service

Once flood waters have receded, there are several things homeowners should remember:

Be sure the septic tanks cover is secure and that inspection ports have not been blocked or damaged. Otherwise, someone could fall into the septic tank...a fatal hazard.

Do not use the sewage system until the water level in the soil absorption field is lower than the water level around the house.

Have your septic tank professionally inspected and serviced if you suspect damage. Signs of damage include settling or an inability to accept water. Most septic tanks are not damaged by flooding since they are below ground and completely covered. However, septic tanks and pump chambers can fill with silt & debris and must be professionally cleaned. If the soil absorption field is clogged with silt, a new system may have to be installed.

Only trained specialists should clean or repair septic tanks because tanks may contain dangerous gases. Contact your Health Unit for a list of septic system contractors who work in your area.

If sewage has backed up into the basement, clean the area with a detergent and then disinfect the affected area with a chlorine solution of 5,000 parts per million (ppm) of common household non-scented bleach by mixing ten parts of water with one part of bleach. Always fill bucket with water first and then add bleach to prevent chemical splashes and allow contact time for at least 10 minutes for effectiveness. Allow washed surfaces to air dry, there is no need for rinsing.

Pump the septic system as soon as possible after the flood. Be sure to pump both the tank and lift station. This will remove silt and debris that may have washed into the system. Do not pump the tank during flooded or saturated drain-field conditions. At best, pumping the tank is only a temporary solution. Under worst conditions, pumping it out could cause the tank to try to float out of the ground and may damage the inlet and outlet pipes.

Do not compact the soil over the soil absorption field by driving or operating equipment in the area. Saturated soil is especially susceptible to compaction, which can reduce the soil absorption field's ability to treat waste-water and lead to system failure.

Examine all electrical connections for damage before restoring electricity. This includes electrical connections for pumps that may be used in your septic system: a septic grinder pump, effluent pump, or ejector pump.

Check the vegetation over your septic tank and soil absorption field. Repair erosion damage and sod or reseed areas as necessary to provide turf grass cover.

Remember: Whenever the water table is high or your sewage system is threatened by flooding, there is a risk that sewage will back up into your home. The only way to prevent this backup is to relieve pressure on the system by using it less.

For more information on disinfecting wells or returning a flooded septic system to service, contact your Health Unit.

*Courtesy of the Haliburton, Kawartha,
Pine Ridge District Health Unit*