

EXCESSIVE RAINS MAY CAUSE PROBLEMS WITH HOME SEPTIC SYSTEMS

Heavy rains and flooding can cause major problems with septic systems. If this happens, affected residents not served by central wastewater systems may need to take precautions to prevent possible sewage contamination. Human exposure to wastewater can lead to disease transmission.

Residents should check to ensure that their systems are not backing up, allowing sewage to surface, or otherwise malfunctioning. If your area is affected by flooding from excessive rains, assess your system and be prepared to take the following steps:

- Wastewater systems may not work until floodwaters recede and the water table drops below the septic tank and drainfield trenches. The septic system will not function if your yard is flooded and should not be used.
- Do NOT continue to use water if sewage backs up into the house or if water or sewage surfacing near the septic system is visible--raw sewage is a public health problem and can cause disease.
- Remove and discard household goods that become contaminated with sewage and cannot be disinfected, such as rugs, wall coverings and drywall. Wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves when cleaning up sewage.
- If a wastewater system depends on a pump, it will not operate properly if the system controls were flooded or when the power is out. Residents should use extreme water conservation practices until flood waters recede and the pump is confirmed to be working properly after power is restored.
- Flush toilets only when necessary, take sponge baths and do not run water while brushing teeth, shaving or dish-cleaning.
- When power to the system is restored and flood waters recede, the pump system's high-water alarm may sound for a period of time but should eventually go off. If the alarm stays on, or if the system does not appear to be working properly in some other way, contact the system operator, installer or county health department. Repairs may be necessary prior to returning to normal water use. Residents may also need the services of an electrician if the sewage system's electrical control panel was submerged or if the service connection sustained any physical damage.
- Most septic tanks are not damaged by a flood, since they are below ground and completely covered. However, septic tanks or pump chambers can become filled with debris. Try to reduce the amount of debris such as yard waste, clean-up materials and sediment that may enter the septic tank and plumbing systems during and after the storm.
- Debris removal activities may damage a septic system. Vehicles can crush drainfields, tanks and distribution boxes, especially when the soil is saturated. If you suspect your septic tank has been damaged, call a professional to inspect, service and clean it, and contact the health department if the system needs to be repaired.

The N.C. Division of Public Health Environmental Health Section has information available on its Web site – <https://ehs.ncpublichealth.com/oswp/resources.htm>. If you have questions or concerns regarding your onsite wastewater system, please call your county Environmental Health Department.