

Sewage Systems in an Emergency

After a Flood

Precautions need to be taken to assure personal safety and to reduce further damage to the existing sewage system and environment.

You will be able to tell if the sewage system has been damaged as raw sewage may be backed up into the toilet, tub or drain. There may be a foul odor, and/or very little water in the toilet bowl. Broken pipes may be visible in the grounds around the building, or sewage may seep to the surface.

If there is any sign of sewage system damage, reduce your use of water immediately. Don't use the washing machine, dishwasher or bathe. Flush toilets only after bowel movements.

PUBLIC SEWERS

On a public sewer, reduce your water use to a minimum to help reduce the load on public pump stations.

SEPTIC TANK SYSTEMS

Septic tank systems that have been flooded should not be used. After waters have receded, check the system for broken lines or sewage surfacing. Correct any problems before using the system.

SEPTIC TANK SYSTEMS AFTER A POWER OUTAGE

Reduce your water use to a minimum, especially if the system has a pump. If all the reserve storage inside the chamber is used, the waste pipes in your home can back up. Turn off the pump at the control panel.

After power is restored, switch the pump on and let run for 5 minutes maximum, then turn it off. Repeat this manual switching every 6 hours until the effluent drops to the "OFF" level and the pump turns off by itself. If only a small amount of water was used, the pump may automatically turn off during the first switching.

WARNING: If the power outage caused the pump to malfunction, do not enter the pump chamber. Gases inside pump chambers are toxic and the lack of oxygen can be fatal.

If you cannot locate the problem, call a certified septic system installer for service or repair.

ALWAYS TURN OFF THE POWER SUPPLY AT THE CIRCUIT BREAKER AND UNPLUG ALL POWER CORDS BEFORE HANDLING PUMP OR FLOATS.

After an Earthquake

In a large magnitude earthquake, sewer lines will probably be damaged and become inoperable. Sewage may back up and broken water lines may become contaminated by sewage.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

If a sewer line blockage is suspected or obvious, discontinue discharge of wastewater in house or building drains and do not flush toilets. Avoid contact with any overflowing wastewater or sewage. Divert wastewater or sewage by ditch, sandbags, or temporary pipeline into a functioning sewer line manhole, or contain by sandbags or berm. Avoid diverting wastewater or sewage into areas of habitation or domestic water supplies.

WHAT CAN I USE WHEN MY SYSTEM IS DOWN?

1. Portable camp toilets, R-V toilets, porta-potties, etc.
2. Large extra-strength trash bags (double bagged) may be placed in watertight plastic or metal containers with tight fitting lids, or used as liners in toilets. Household disinfectant can be used for odor control. Final disposal can be by burying or sanitary sewer when notified by public officials.
3. A dug latrine or trench, 2-3 feet deep, can be used to bury human waste. Choose a good location for the latrine that will not be close to surface water, wells, or children's play areas. Spread a thin layer of powdered lime and a layer of earth each time it is used.