GUIDANCE FOR SEPTIC SYSTEMS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER A FLOOD

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO PROTECT YOUR HEALTH AND SEPTIC SYSTEM

Safety Reminders

- Get help from a septic system service professional for steps with this symbol.
- Steps with a ☑️ only apply to pressure distribution systems.
- Get help from a septic system service professional if any of the steps feel unsafe in your situation or your system loses power.
- Make sure power to the septic system is off before inspecting the area.
- Be careful walking near a damaged system.
- Wait to enter damaged structures until they are cleared by a trained inspector.
- Wear gloves and eye protection when inspecting your septic system.
- Never enter the pump chamber or septic tank.

- Make sure the land around the manhole covers is sloped downwards away from the septic system.
- Turn off electricity to the system at the circuit breaker.
- Turn off your pump at the circuit box if you have a pressure distribution or mound system.
- After the power is off, waterproof all electrical connections.
- Plug all drains in the basement.
- Reduce water use in the house.
- Seal the manhole and inspection ports if possible to keep out excess water.

During the Flood

- Follow emergency and evacuation advice for your area.
- Eliminate all non-essential water use and flush toilets as little as possible if evacuation is not needed.
- If the drain field becomes covered with water, do not use the system and avoid contact with any standing water that may contain sewage.
- Try to find other toilets if your septic system is damaged. If there are not toilets available, see the guidance on temporary toilets below.

After the Flood

Consult with a septic system service professional and follow the steps below.
- Rope off your septic system. There is danger of collapse for septic tanks.
- Stay out of the area if sewage backs up. If the entire building is contaminated, abandon the building until all affected areas have been cleaned.
- If the septic system is above the flood point:
  - Have the tank pumped by a permitted liquid waste hauler/pumper.

Before the Flood

Take these steps to reduce the effects of an impending flood on your septic system.
- Maintain your septic system.
- Know your septic system and take pictures or keep documents of the following to reference later if there is damage:
  - Septic tank location.
  - Septic system records or drawings.
  - Electrical components.
- Temporarily use the septic system as a holding tank.
- Do not have the septic tank pumped under flooded conditions. Pumping it out could cause the tank to float out of the ground. Recently installed systems may pop out of the ground.
- Avoid using the system and do not dig around the septic tank while the soil is flooded.
- Reduce water use until the system is inspected:
  - Avoid sending basement sump pump water into the septic system.
  - Re-route water from roof gutters away from the drain field area.
  - Take short showers.
  - Limit laundry and dishwashing.
  - Turn off the water while brushing teeth, shaving, or rinsing dishes.
  - Do not flush the toilet each time it’s used for liquid waste
- If you have a pressure distribution system and your pump was not removed, a septic system service professional will need to inspect and repair the pump.

Temporary Toilets

- Use a five-gallon bucket as a toilet. You can add a toilet seat and set it up like a modified toilet (above).
- If you must dig a hole for your waste, make sure it’s at least 200 feet (70 adult steps) from water bodies and at least six inches deep. Fill it in after a single use, tamp the dirt down. This is a short-term option only and regulations may vary by jurisdiction.

OTHER SYSTEMS

If you have an advanced treatment unit or any other type of onsite wastewater treatment system not addressed above, contact a septic system service professional or your local health department.

Professional System Inspection

Contact a septic system service professional for an inspection before using the septic system again. An inspection may include the following:

- Open all parts of the system and see if debris entered the system. All sewage tanks should be pumped and cleaned out.
- Check the tanks for water tightness and structural defects.
- Make sure that inspection ports are free of blockage and damage. Replace and secure septic tank manhole covers as needed.
- Check the drain field and the area over the septic tank for depressions and damage from fallen debris. Repair with sod or seeding to provide good plant cover.