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

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO PROTECT YOUR HEALTH AND SEPTIC SYSTEM

- Mark system components with a fire-resistant maker such as a rock.
- 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.
- Turn off electricity to the system at the circuit breaker.
- After the power is off, wrap control panels, plastic risers, and lids with a durable flame-resistant sheet plastic.
- Follow defensible space guidelines (use the Cal Fire App or local guidance).

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 burned 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.

Before the Wildfire

Take these steps to reduce the effects of an impending wildfire 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.

During the Wildfire

- 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.
- 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 Wildfire

Consult with a septic system service professional and follow the steps below.
- Rope off your septic system. The manhole and tank covers may be damaged and could cause falls.
- 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. A septic system service professional should be contacted to inspect and repair the system if it was 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. Inspect and repair the system if it was flooded.

## 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 for damage to above and below ground septic system components.
- Check for damage to piping where pipes enter the home.
- 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.
- Make sure wastewater moves between the parts of the system as intended.
- If your property was damaged, a month after the system is restarted, schedule a follow-up visit to check for proper operation.

## Temporary Toilets

Only use a temporary toilet if there are no functioning toilets available and the wildfire is expected to last several days.
- Check to see if you can stay somewhere else.
- Contract a PortaPotty for temporary use.
- Modify your own toilet:
  - Shut off the water valve to the toilet. If you can’t close it, try another option.
  - Flush out any water still in the bowl.
  - Line your toilet bowl (under the seat) with a plastic kitchen garbage bag inside of another kitchen bag.
  - Into the inner bag, put some kitty litter, dry peat moss, lime, or something similar that will absorb liquid.
  - Do not mix urine and fecal material if possible.
  - After using the toilet, close the inner plastic bag with a plastic tie or other method.
  - Store full bags in a secure area. Consider a watertight bucket or trashcan.
  - Dispose of the bags when possible.
- 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.