



# COUNTY OF ORANGE

## HEALTH CARE AGENCY

### ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

---

#### INDIVIDUAL SEPTIC SYSTEMS AFTER A DEBRIS FLOW OR FLOOD EVENT

After a debris flow or flood event, excessive water can accumulate in leach fields, leach lines, or seepage pit areas causing the septic system to become sluggish, to back up, or to stop functioning when toilets are flushed, or when other waste fixtures are used. When flooding or saturated soil conditions exist, a septic system cannot function properly and can lead to a back up of sewage in the home, contaminate the drinking water supply and provide for a lack of sanitation in the home until the floodwaters and saturated soil conditions have receded.

#### Under flooded or saturated soil conditions:

- If there is a backup in the home or an overflow of sewage onto the surface of the ground, immediately stop all water usage until the flooding or ground saturation diminishes.
- **Do NOT have the septic tank pumped.** Pumping the septic tank out could cause the tank to try and float out of the ground and damage the inlet and outlet pipes.
- Use a portable chemical toilet. Small units are available from camping, RV and hardware stores. Larger chemical toilets, such as those used at construction sites and festivals may be rented. The functioning toilet facilities of a motor home, travel trailer, or a neighboring home may also be used.

#### Once floodwaters have receded:

- Do not drink well water until it is tested. For more information, see <http://ochealthinfo.com/regulatory/water/flood.htm>.
- 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 and 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 a qualified septic system contractor in your area.
- If sewage has backed up into a basement, clean the area and disinfect the floor. Use a chlorine solution of a half cup of chlorine bleach to each gallon of water to disinfect the area thoroughly.
- Pump the septic system as soon as possible after the flooding and ground saturation dissipates. 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 soil conditions.**

- 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 wastewater and lead to system failure.
- Consult a qualified electrician to examine all electrical connections for damage before restoring electricity.
- Be sure the septic tank's manhole cover is secure and that inspection ports have not been blocked or damaged.
- 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.

For more information on individual septic systems, call the National Environmental Services Center at (800) 624-8301 or visit their website at [www.nesc.wvu.edu](http://www.nesc.wvu.edu).