

Septic System Flooding

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When flooded or saturated soil conditions occur, a septic system can not function properly. This may result in sewage backing up in your home, damage to your septic system, and contaminated drinking water.

What to do before flooding:

- Don't compact the drainfield area by driving heavy equipment on it or placing sandbags over it. Compacting the soil can reduce the system's ability to treat wastewater and lead to system failure.
- Make sure septic tank's inspection ports are watertight or place a sandbag over them.
- If your system has an effluent screen, place a sandbag over it.
- If your system has a lift pump, make sure the power to it is turned off.
- Plug sewage lines in your home to prevent the backup of sewage into your home.

What to do after the flooding:

- Do not use the septic system until the soil in the drainfield area is no longer saturated.
- Have your system professionally serviced if you suspect damage.
- Only trained specialists should clean or repair septic tanks because tanks may contain dangerous gases. Contact your health department or Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for a list of septic system contractors who work in your area.
- If sewage has backed up into the 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. Additional clean up information can be found at: <http://doh.sd.gov/Flood/>.
- Pump the septic system as soon as possible after the flood. Be sure to pump both the tank and any lift station. This will remove silt and debris that may have washed into the system. Do not pump the tank during flooded or saturated drainfield conditions. At best, pumping the tank is only a temporary solution. Under worst conditions, pumping it out could cause the tank to try to float out of the ground and may damage the inlet and outlet pipes.
- 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.
- Examine all electrical connections for damage before restoring electricity.
- Be sure the septic tank's inspection port 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.

Private Drinking Water Well:

- Caution, it is recommended you do not drink well water until it has been tested.