



## Frequently Asked Questions Bellevue Area Ground Water Flood: My Septic System

- 1. Are there any immediate serious safety hazards in regards to my flooded septic system?**  
Yes. Property owners whose septic systems have been flooded should be concerned first for **immediate safety hazards** such as the increased risk of a dangerous collapse of a septic tank, drywell or cesspool. Site-built components, such as tanks made of dry-laid stone or concrete blocks, may have been weakened by flood waters. Rope off and prevent access to the area where such systems are installed until you have made certain there is no danger of collapse. Never leave the cover off of a septic tank, cesspool or manhole; someone can fall in.  
**Electrical hazards:** if your septic system includes electrical components such as pumps, be sure electrical power has been turned off before attempting to examine the equipment. Consult a qualified electrician to examine all electrical connections for damage before restoring electricity.  
**Health hazards:** Whenever the water table is high or your sewage system is threatened by flooding, there is a risk sewage will back up into your home. Sewage backup into a home leaves a variety of pathogens and conditions for hidden mold growth. Both of these can create health hazards, particularly for people who are at extra risk including infants, the elderly, the immune-impaired and people with asthma or respiratory conditions.
- 2. Can I use my septic system if it is under flood water?**  
Use common sense. If possible, don't use the system during saturated or flooded conditions. The wastewater will not be treated and will become a source of pollution. Saturated soil cannot accept, absorb and treat the wastewater in these conditions. Waste water will follow the path of least resistance, either up to the surface or back into the home. Conserve water as much as possible while the system restores itself and the water table resides. In extreme flood conditions, altogether stopping the use of the system may be needed. Portable toilets may be utilized or other facilities until flood waters recede.
- 3. Where can I find information on my septic system?**  
Please contact your local health department for additional advice and assistance regarding your septic system. Depending on the age of your system, the local health department may have a permit record of the system's location and components.
- 4. If my septic system has been flooded, will I need to have the tank(s) pumped before it is used again?**  
At best, pumping the tank(s) is only a temporary solution. With saturated ground conditions during and after a flood event, pumping any tank or component could cause them to float or pop out of the ground and may damage the inlet and outlet pipes. Do not open the septic tank for pumping while flood waters are high, mud and silt may enter the tank and end up in the leach field. The best solution is to prevent any excessive water from entering the system, such as floor drains,

sump pumps or water softeners and to reduce and spread out water usage in the home. In extreme flood conditions, altogether ceasing the use of the system may be warranted. Portable toilets may be utilized or other restroom facilities until flood waters recede.

**5. I have an aerator or pretreatment component that has been flooded. Will it need to be inspected or serviced before it is used again?**

Yes. Flood waters may have damaged electrical components of any control panels or motors as well as introduced silt and debris into pumps and tanks. Aerobic units, up flow filters, trickling filters and other media filters have a tendency to clog due to mud and sediment. These systems will need to be washed and/or raked. Contact a qualified septic system contractor in your area.

**6. Other advice:**

**7. -Have your septic tank professionally inspected and serviced if you suspect damage.**

-Prevent silt from entering septic systems with pump chambers. When the pump chambers are flooded, silt has a tendency to settle in the chambers and will clog the leach field if it is not removed.

-Do not dig into the tank or leach field area while the soil is flooded or wet. Do not compact the soil over the leach field by driving or operating equipment in the area. Saturated soil is especially susceptible to compaction, which can reduce or destroy the soil's ability to absorb and treat wastewater thus leading to system failure.

-Flooding of the septic tank will have lifted the floating crust of fats and grease in the septic tank. Some of this scum may have floated and/or partially plugged the outlet tee. If the septic system backs up into the house, check the tank first for outlet blockage. Clean up any floodwater in the house without dumping it into the sink or toilet and allow enough time for the water to recede. Floodwaters from the house that are passed through or pumped into the septic tank will cause higher flows through the system. This may cause solids to transfer from the septic tank to the leach field and will cause clogging.

-Use a portable chemical toilet. Small units are available from camping, RV and hardware stores. Larger chemical toilets, such as those used at festivals may be rented. The functioning toilet facilities of a motor home, travel trailer or a neighboring home may also be used.

If you have additional questions about your private water well or septic system you may call your local health department, call the Ohio Department of Health, Residential Water & Sewage Program at (614)466-1390 or by email at [BEH@odh.ohio.gov](mailto:BEH@odh.ohio.gov). For flood-water specific issues, you may contact Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources Division of Water at 614-265-6747