

# What to Do When Your Septic System has Flooded

- **Do NOT** use your sinks and toilets if the soil around your house and septic system is still waterlogged or flooded. Your septic system will not work under those conditions.
- Contact the local municipal authority or a qualified septic system installer to have a professional evaluation of potential damage to your septic system from the flood and receding flood waters.

## *How will I know if the flood damaged my septic system or my septic field?*

Signs that your septic tank was damaged during flooding may include the following conditions:

- settling and/or sinking of the soil around your septic tank or septic field
- sudden holes appearing in the soil around your septic tank and field system, where there previously were none
- household wastewater is not draining properly, such as water draining very slowly or not at all from the sinks, and toilets draining very slowly or making strange noises when you flush them
- water backing up in the floor drain in your basement
- sewage ponding on the ground outside of your home

If you suspect that your septic tank was damaged during the flood, contact a qualified septic system contractor to assess the status of your system and conduct any necessary repairs. **Do NOT use** your septic system if you think that it is damaged.

The septic tank and the pump chamber may be clogged by silt or debris from the floodwaters. If this has happened, you need to contact a qualified professional to remove the silt and debris from these. **Do NOT** try to do this on your own, as there are dangerous gases inside your septic tank.

If your septic field is clogged by silt, a new field system may have to be installed. Check with a qualified septic system installer.

## *What should I do first?*

1. Check to see if all septic tank maintenance covers are still in place.
2. Repair any damaged tank outlet covers, and replace any missing tank outlet covers immediately.

3. Restrict the amount of water being used in your home to allow the water saturating the soil around your septic tank and field to dry out. Restrict your household water usage temporarily.
  - Do not do laundry at home if possible (use a laundromat).
  - Do not use the dishwasher or garbage disposal.
  - Re-direct water from your roof downspouts away from the septic field.
  - Reduce the number of daily showers or baths per household member.
  - Do not have water from your basement sump pump going into the septic system.
4. Contact the local municipal authority or a qualified septic system installer to have a professional evaluation of potential damage to your septic system from the flood and receding flood waters.

### *Is it a good idea for me to pump out my septic tank right away?*

**No.** Do NOT pump out your septic tank when the soil around the tank or the drainage field is still saturated with water. This may cause the septic tank to float and break out of the ground, damaging the tank inlet and outlet pipes.

### *When can I use my septic system again?*

- **Do NOT** use your septic system until it has been checked to ensure it hasn't been damaged by the flood.
- **Do NOT** use your septic system until the standing water in the septic field is lower than the water level around your house or buildings.
- **Do NOT** use your septic system until all electrical connections have been checked for damage (before restoring electricity to the pump).
- **Do NOT** use your septic system until the outlet tee on your tank has been checked for a blockage. The scum layer of fats/grease inside your septic tank may have floated to the top of the tank during the flooding, resulting in partial blockage of the outlet. This can result in a potential sewage backup into your house.
- **Do NOT** pump any floodwater inside your home into the sink or toilet. This can cause a higher volume of wastewater to enter your septic tank, and may result in pushing waste solids that should settle in the septic tank, to enter your septic field and clog the septic pipes in your septic field.

### *How soon can I have my septic system worked on?*

- Wait until all of the soils around your septic tank and field are no longer saturated by flood water and are dry before you bring in contractors to work on your septic system.
- **Do NOT** drive equipment or vehicles over your septic field. Wet soils compact more quickly, which will reduce the ability of your system to work properly in the future, or may cause damage to the buried pipes of your septic field.
- **Do NOT** set dumpsters or building materials on top of your septic field during clean-up and rebuilding; this will further damage your septic field.

**For more information, please contact your nearest Environmental Public Health office.**

Edmonton Main Office  
Calgary Main Office  
Lethbridge Office

780-735-1800  
403-943-2295  
403-388-6689

Grande Prairie Main Office  
Red Deer Main Office  
[www.albertahealthservices.ca/eph.asp](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/eph.asp)

780-513-7517  
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4EPHW-13-002  
Created: Jun/13