

AFTER THE FLOOD: SEWAGE SYSTEMS

FACT SHEET

Flooding of a private sewage system can be a hazardous situation for homeowners. It can lead to a back-up of sewage in the home, contaminated drinking water, and lack of sanitation until the system is fixed. Raw, untreated sewage poses a threat to human health. We cannot control rainfall or flooding; we can, however, prepare for high water problems and respond appropriately to flooding.

Remember:

- Whenever the water table is high, or your sewage system is threatened by flood water, you run the risk that sewage will back up into your home.
- Relieving pressure on the system (by using it less) is the only way you can help prevent a back-up.

Preparing for Flooding

- Make sure all septic tanks are full of liquid; empty tanks are buoyant and may “pop” out of the ground during flooding.
- Plug floor drains to try to keep sewer from backing up into the basement.



Cleaning Up

If there has been a backflow of sewage into your house, clean-up should commence as soon as possible and proceed keeping the following in mind:

- Remove all water, sewage, and contaminated materials—a septic pumping business can remove water and sewage.
- Thoroughly clean and mop the area.
- Treat the flooded area with an appropriate disinfectant.
- Dehumidify.
- Throw away all absorbent materials, such as rugs, drywall, and wall coverings.
- Wash clothes contaminated with sewage water in hot water and detergent and separately from uncontaminated clothes and linens.
- Protect yourself from contamination by wearing rubber boots, waterproof gloves, and protective garments. Wash your hands thoroughly when the job is done.

Chemical Disinfection

The process of disinfection is important to insure the elimination of disease-causing bacteria, viruses, and fungi. Thorough cleaning must take place before disinfection to insure effectiveness. Disinfect areas where sewage has backed up with a chlorine solution of 1 cup bleach to 5 gallons of water or 2-3 tablespoons bleach to 1 quart of water.

Homeowners should avoid using the septic system, allowing time for the water to recede and the soil around the drain field to dry out.

Have your system professionally inspected and serviced if you suspect damage.

For more information, contact CCHD's Public Health Emergency Preparedness Program at 452-0881 x310 or visit www.cchdmt.org or www.cdc.gov.