



Saskatchewan Ministry of Health

PRIVATE SEWAGE

SYSTEM - Cleaning Up After the Flood

The following information is an excerpt from “Cleaning Up After the Flood: A Guide for Homeowners”, which can be viewed in its entirety on the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health website at <http://www.health.gov.sk.ca/cleaning-up-after-a-flood> .

Private sewage systems often consist of two parts: a septic tank and a drain field. If a more advanced treatment scheme is present that includes such units as upflow filters and trickling filters, the manufacturer should be contacted for directions. In general, these systems will need to be washed and raked. Also, for all types of systems, ensure that any electrical and mechanical devices are safely inspected prior to reactivating.

Septic Tanks

Check the siphon/pumping chamber (second compartment) to ensure that the intake of the siphon or pump is not blocked. Septic tanks and holding tanks may have to be pumped out to remove all solids and liquids before operating properly. Do NOT have the septic tank pumped out under flooded or saturated conditions as it could cause the tank to try and float out of the ground and damage the inlet and outlet pipes.

Do not open a septic tank for pumping while the soil is still saturated or flooded. Mud and silt may enter the tank and end up in the drain field. However, after the ground has dried out it is important to have the septic system pumped out as mud and silt may have entered the tank and this material can clog the drain field. If the drain field becomes clogged with silt and mud, a new field may have to be constructed.

Be sure the manhole cover is secure and that inspection ports have not been blocked or damaged. If the septic system backs up into the house, check the tank first for outlet blockage. Flooding of the tank may have lifted the layer of fats and grease and partially or completely blocked the outlet tee.

Never enter a septic tank without following the appropriate Occupational Health and Safety requirements such as using a certified air pack, safety harness and winch. The atmosphere in a septic tank can be lethal and cause death without the use of proper safety equipment. At least one observer must be present when anyone enters a septic tank.

Drain Field

Flooding may cause damage to your private sewage disposal field. The disposal field should not be used until the field has dried and the water level in the disposal field is lower than the water level around the house. If your drain field area is flooded or very saturated, you might notice some problems such as drains in the house will run slow; toilets drain slowly or sound strange when flushed; and water may back up into floor drains in the basement.

If the drain field must be used (as may be the case for a permanent residence where other temporary options are not available), drastically reduce water use in the home. Remember that the drain field was designed to infiltrate the amount of water normally discharged from the house. When additional water from rain, snow or flooding is added to the drain field, its ability to handle and treat household waste is seriously limited. Some suggested ways to reduce water use are:

- Fix all leaking fixtures.
- Do not pump from the sump to the septic system.
- Do not let eavestroughs or sump pump discharge run over the drain field area.
- Reduce the number of times you flush the toilet.
- Reduce the number of showers and baths. One bath or shower every other day per person is a possible option.
- Do not use the dishwasher or garbage disposal.
- Do not do laundry in your home. If needed, take it to a laundromat.

In addition, the following actions should be taken to ensure that your drain field is operating properly:

- Examine the vegetation over your tank and absorption field. Repair erosion damage and sod or reseed as necessary to provide a vegetative cover.
- Do not compact the soil over the absorption field by driving or operating equipment over the area.

For general guidelines for private sewage systems, see Saskatchewan Health's Onsite Wastewater Disposal Guide:

<http://www.health.gov.sk.ca/wastewater-disposal-guide>