



Recovering After the Flood

Restarting Onsite Waste Water Disposal Systems

Onsite waste water disposal systems such as septic tanks, leach drains and aerobic treatment units all require relatively dry soils to operate efficiently. If the soil in the absorption/disposal area is too wet the system will not work and sewage may overflow either outside or back inside your house.

What is an Onsite Waste Water Disposal System?

Onsite waste water disposal systems include septic tanks and aerobic treatment systems including the absorption/disposal area of land used to soak or evaporate waste water such as leach drains.

What can happen to the Onsite Waste Water Disposal System during a flood?

Flooding of the chambers in the septic tank or primary/secondary treatment tanks can lift the floating crust of fats, grease and other materials that naturally form on top of the waste water. Once lifted the crust can block either the inlet or outlet pipes of the tank and possibly cause solids to transfer from the septic tank to the leach drain or disposal system. In addition septic tanks, leach drains, pump pits and irrigation pipework can fill with silt and debris which will either reduce the capacity or effectiveness of the treatment system.

What should I do if my onsite waste water disposal system has been under flood water?

Do not use any toilets, laundry, kitchen, bathroom or clean-up equipment connected to the onsite waste water disposal system until:

- all parts of the waste water treatment and disposal system have been professionally inspected and repaired.
- your onsite waste water disposal system has been approved for use by the Local Authority Environmental Health Officer. (Contact your Local Authority Environmental Health Officer for more information.)

How can my onsite waste water disposal system be repaired?

- Only trained specialists are suitably equipped to clean or repair onsite waste disposal systems because tanks may contain dangerous gases and other harmful materials. Contact your Local Authority Environmental Health Officer for a list of waste water disposal system contractors who work in your area.
- Onsite waste water disposal systems should be pumped out by a licensed septic tank operator as soon as possible after the flood. However, before this can be done it is important to ensure that the water level in the ground surrounding the tanks is as low as possible. It is possible for empty tanks to float out of the ground causing damage to underground pipework.

WASTE WATER PUMPING AND DISPOSAL

Sewage may only be collected, transported and disposed of by a licensed septic tank operator. Contact your Local Authority Environmental Health Officer for more information.



Are there any other issues I need to consider?

- Sun light and drying will remove any health risk posed by sewage contamination in your garden. However, any areas of your garden that may be saturated or visibly contaminated with sewage can be decontaminated either by using hydrated lime (Builders lime) or covered with clean fill topsoil.
- Fruit and vegetables grown in your garden in contact with flood water may also be contaminated by sewage and should not be consumed.
- Do not drive or operate heavy equipment over the soil absorption/disposal area as saturated soils are especially susceptible to compaction. Compaction can reduce the soil's ability to treat wastewater and lead to system failure.
- The soil in the absorption/disposal area may also need to be replaced if it is clogged with silt left behind by floodwaters.
- Any electrical equipment connected to an onsite waste water treatment system should be examined by a licensed electrician before the power is switched on.
- Once the tanks have been pumped out and inspected make sure that any manholes or inspection openings are closed and secured.
- Dedicated garden areas irrigated by onsite waste water disposal systems may require replanting.

Weblinks

More information is available from:

Recovering After the Flood - Clean up Information to Householders

<http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/cproot/3626/2/Recovering%20After%20the%20Flood.pdf>

And also 24 hours a day by sending an email to healthinfo@health.wa.gov.au

Type the following key words into the subject line to obtain the information you want:

- Bulk** - Code of Practice for the Bulk Cartage of Water .
- Emergency** - Emergency Treatment of Drinking Water Supplies - pamphlet.
- Filter** - Water Filters - Pamphlet
- Signs** - Do not drink, Health Warning and Treat Before You Drink signs

More Information:

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Environmental Health Directorate
Department of Health
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PERTH BUSINESS CENTRE WA 6849

Telephone: 08 9388 4999

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