

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



Rick Scott
Governor

Celeste Philip, MD, MPH
State Surgeon General

Vision: To be the **Healthiest State** in the Nation

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM IS FLOODED

FORT MYERS – Remember: Whenever the water table is high or your sewage system is threatened by flooding there is a risk that sewage will back up into your home. The only way to prevent this backup is to relieve pressure on the system by using it less.

IF A SEWAGE BACKUP OCCURS:

When a sewage backup occurs in your residence or business, or when sewage overflows onto the surface of the ground, **the following must be done until the flooding or ground saturation dissipates:**

- if there is a backup or visible overflow of sewage onto the ground, **immediately stop all water usage**. Once the flooding and groundwater saturation diminishes, the septic system should again operate normally.
- if the system is slow or sluggish, but still operating, minimize the amount of liquids and solids put into the system.

If the septic system is flooded or the ground is saturated so that toilets back up:

- Pumping the tank will not be effective since the flooding/saturation will fill the tank as quickly as it is pumped.
- Use a portable chemical toilet — small units are available from camping, RV, and hardware stores. Larger chemical toilets, such as those used at construction sites and festivals may be rented; these units are recommended for apartments, condos, and office buildings (see Yellow Pages under “Toilets-Portable”). The functioning toilet facilities of a motor home, travel trailer, or a neighboring home can also be used.
- If portable chemical toilets are unavailable, use large extra-strength trash bags (double bagged) as liners in toilets, or contain waste in water tight plastic or metal containers with tight fitting lids. Use household disinfectant (such as bleach) for odor control. Final disposal can be by sanitary sewer (when notified by public officials), garbage pickup, or by burial once flood waters have receded.

What do I do with my septic system after the flood?

Once floodwaters have receded, there are several things homeowners should remember:

- Do not drink well water until it is tested. Contact the Lee county health department at 239-274-2200.
- Do not use the sewage system until water in the soil absorption field is lower than the water level around the house.
- Have your septic tank professionally inspected and serviced if you suspect damage. Signs of damage include settling or an inability to accept water. Most septic tanks are not damaged by flooding since they are below ground and completely covered. However, septic tanks and pump chambers can fill with silt and debris, and must be professionally cleaned. If the soil absorption field is clogged with silt, a new system may have to be installed.

Florida Department of Health

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- Only trained specialists should clean or repair septic tanks because tanks may contain dangerous gases. Contact your health department for a list of septic system contractors who work in your area.
- If sewage has backed up into the basement, clean the area and disinfect the floor. Use a chlorine solution of a half cup of chlorine bleach to each gallon of water to disinfect the area thoroughly.
- Do not pump the tank during flooded or saturated drainfield conditions. At best, pumping the tank is only a temporary solution. Under worst conditions, pumping it out could cause the tank to try to float out of the ground and may damage the inlet and outlet pipes.
- Do not compact the soil over the soil absorption field by driving or operating equipment in the area. Saturated soil is especially susceptible to compaction, which can reduce the soil absorption field's ability to treat wastewater and lead to system failure.
- Examine all electrical connections for damage before restoring electricity.
- Be sure the septic tank's manhole cover is secure and that inspection ports have not been blocked or damaged.
- Check the vegetation over your septic tank and soil absorption field. Repair erosion damage and sod or reseed areas as necessary to provide turf grass cover.

What if sewage has overflowed in my house?

- Wash all contaminated areas with detergent and water, then rinse with a sanitizing solution made from **one tablespoon household bleach** (5.25% sodium hypochlorite) **to each gallon of water. (1 tablespoon = 3 teaspoons or ½ fluid ounce)**
- Be sure to clean and sanitize all contaminated areas — pay special attention to cooking utensils, work surfaces, children's toys, and surface areas such as floors and walls which family and pets may come in contact.

For further information, please contact the Lee county health department or visit <http://lee.floridahealth.gov/> or www.FloridaDisaster.org.

The Florida Emergency Information Line: 1-800-342-3557

Public Information Emergency Support Function: 850-921-0384