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Door County Public Health Department News Release— Flooding #6: Septic Systems and Flooding

Septic Systems and Flooding

Do I pump my tank during flooded or saturated drainfield conditions?

No! 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. The best solution is to plug all drains in the basement and drastically reduce water use in the house.

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.
- 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.
- Only trained specialists should clean or repair septic tanks because tanks may contain dangerous gases.
- 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 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.

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 possible, don't use the system if the soil is saturated and flooded. The wastewater will not be treated and will become a source of pollution. Conserve water as much as possible while the system restores itself and the water table falls.

Source: EPA at <http://1.usa.gov/1CA1sfl>.

Additional information is available from the National Environmental Services Center Newsletter at <http://bit.ly/1nBnxkn>.

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