



FACT SHEET

Office of Water Resources- Onsite Program

Flood Response and Septic Systems

Septic systems can cease to function properly when property is inundated with flood waters or when the groundwater rises to extremes. In most cases, a septic system will resume proper functioning when the flood water recedes or the groundwater level returns to normal. In some cases, sewage may overflow onto the surface of the ground or, where plumbing facilities exist in the basement, sewage may back-up into the basement. **In the event of a back-up, care should be taken to limit contact with the sewage and flood waters that may contain sewage.**

Basement flooding can also occur or be caused by rising groundwater, intruding through cracks or openings in the foundation floor or wall. Where a septic system is flooded and located near a flooded basement foundation, there is some risk that the groundwater seeping in may be contaminated by inadequately treated sewage from the system.

Sewage that backs-up into a basement may be returned to the septic system once it resumes functioning or may be removed by a professional sewage pumper. Groundwater in a flooded basement should not be pumped into the septic system as the system is not designed for such a large quantity of water and doing so may compromise its treatment function.

Where contact with flood water has occurred or is required, persons are urged to follow the HEALTH issued advisories about cleaning up safely and preventing illness from dirty water at <http://www.health.ri.gov/>.

EPA has further information on septic system do's and don'ts after flooding and may be found at: http://www.epa.gov/safewater/faq/emergency_septic.html