

**For More Information:**

Technical advice and information:  
**Oregon Public Health Division  
 Environmental Toxicology Section**  
 Ph. 971-673-0440  
 Fax. 971-673-0457  
<http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/ophs/index.shtml>

You can visit the following Web sites for more information about flood recovery and public health:

**Oregon Department of Human Services - State Public Health Division:**  
[www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/ophs](http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/ophs)

**Oregon Department of Environmental Quality - Disaster Cleanup:**  
[www.oregon.gov/DEQ/stormdebrismgt.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/DEQ/stormdebrismgt.shtml)

**U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention - After a Flood:**  
[www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/after.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/after.asp)

**Introduction**

If you have a septic tank and drainfield or other subsurface sewage disposal system, the system may stop working during and after serious flooding. This may be an indication that replacement or repair work needs to be done, or it is possible that no work needs to be done and the system may resume working when the water has subsided and the soil is no longer saturated.

**Septic failure**

- If your sewage disposal system has stopped working and wastewater has backed up into your plumbing, it is important that you stop putting additional waste or water into the system until it is repaired or has resumed working.
- Do not pump the septic tank, and do not assume that your plumbing is plugged. It is likely that the system is just flooded with water and temporarily cannot accept any more.
- Arrange for alternative toilet facilities. Use those of a neighbor or arrange for placement of chemical toilets near your home for the time being.

**Temporary waste disposal**

- Wastewater that you produce while the system is not working may be poured into a hole dug in the ground in a location at least 100 feet away from any well, stream or other water body.
- The hole should be covered between uses to ensure that it is not a safety hazard to people or animals.
- Toilet waste can be disposed of in this same manner during cleanup and recovery.
- Since wastewater is usually contaminated to some degree it should not be merely poured on the surface of the ground and should never be thrown into streams, rivers, ponds, lakes or ditches leading to them.

**Local Health Departments**

Baker .....	541-523-8211
Benton.....	541-766-6835
Clackamas .....	503-655-8430
Clatsop .....	503-325-8500
Columbia .....	503-397-4651
Coos.....	541-756-2020
.....ext. 510	
Crook.....	541-447-5165
Curry.....	541-247-3300
Deschutes.....	541-322-7400
Douglas.....	800-234-0985
Gilliam.....	541-384-2061
Grant .....	541-575-0429
Harney .....	541-573-2271
Hood River .....	541-386-1115
Jackson.....	541-774-8209
Jefferson .....	541-475-4456
Josephine .....	541-474-5325
Klamath.....	541-882-8846
Lake .....	541-947-6045
Lane.....	541-682-4041
Lincoln.....	541-265-4112
Linn.....	541-967-3888
Malheur.....	541-889-7279
Marion .....	503-584-4870
Morrow.....	541-676-5421
Multnomah.....	503-988-3674
Polk.....	503-623-8175
Sherman .....	541-506-2600
Tillamook.....	503-842-3900
Umatilla.....	541-278-5432
Union .....	541-962-8801
Wallowa.....	541-426-4848
Wasco.....	541-506-2600
Washington .....	503-846-3594
Wheeler.....	541-763-2725
Yamhill.....	503-434-7525

**If you have a disability and need this document in an alternate format, call (971) 673-1321**

- If the system has been deeply buried by silt, it may be necessary to remove some of the excessive cover over the disposal area.

**Inspection and repair**

- Inspect the area where your septic tank and drainfield or other subsurface disposal system is located to see if the system is visibly damaged.
- If floodwaters have washed out or exposed any portion of the disposal system, it will be necessary that it be repaired before you resume use of it. Be sure to contact your local health department and Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) representative before you do any significant repair or modification to a disposal system.
- While the disposal system is flooded it is very unlikely that the system will work at all, and it could be a number of days or weeks after the surface water disappears before the soil will be able to absorb wastewater. All you can do is wait until the water recedes and the ground begins to dry out.
- Septic tanks and other submerged tanks should never be pumped or cleaned when soils are saturated or groundwater tables are within five feet of the surface of the ground. An empty or partially pumped tank may collapse from the outside pressure, or worse yet, the tank may be lifted out of the ground by the weight of water around it.
- You should contact your local county health department and the closest office of the state DEQ for specific advice and assistance if your system is visibly damaged or will not work after the floodwater subsides.