



COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE • COMMUNITY HEALTH AGENCY  
**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN NO. 93-01A

DISTRICT ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES DIVISION

## SEPTIC TANK FAILURE DURING EXCESSIVE RAINS/FLOOD CONDITIONS

When rainwater or drainage water ponds over leach fields or flooding saturates the ground in leach line/seepage pit areas, this maximum saturation causes the septic system waste plumbing to become sluggish or to back up or cease to operate when commodes/toilets are flushed and waste fixtures are utilized. If the septic system was properly operating prior to flooding/ground saturation household waste water should not overflow onto the surface of the ground.

When backup within the residence occurs or in the event of overflow onto the surface of the ground the following must be accomplished until the area flooding or ground saturation dissipates:

- If system backup is slow or sluggish but still operating: minimize the amount of liquids and solids usage.
- Backup or visible overflow onto ground surface: stop all water usage. When flooding/ground water saturation diminishes the septic system should again operate normally.

### WHEN BACKUP OCCURS:

- If the septic tank is above the ground saturation or flooding area, the septic tank can be pumped by a permitted liquid waste hauler/pumper (see telephone directory yellow pages). The septic tank can be utilized as a holding tank and will accept household waste water and not overflow into leach lines until full. Most septic tanks are 1,000 gals or larger - minimum individual waste water production per person per day i.e. showers, dish washing, laundry, etc. average 50 gals minimum to 100 gals per 24 hour period.
  - The total period to fill the septic tank (now a holding tank) can be calculated i.e. for example 4 persons X 50 gals equals 200 gals/day. It would then take approximately 5 days to fill the tank completely before another pumping.
- If the septic tank system is completely inundated by flood/saturation such that no waste water will be accepted the following is suggested:
  - In this case pumping the tank (as indicated above) will not be effective as it will fill as fast as it is pumped.
  - Procure and use a portable chemical toilet: Small units found in camping/RV/hardware outlets. Larger ones such as those seen at temporary events and construction sites may be utilized. Consult the yellow pages in local telephone directories.
  - Utilize the functional facilities of a motor home/camping trailer or those of a neighboring home.
- Overflowing or the dumping of raw sewage is to be avoided. When it occurs on the scene in an isolated homeowner environment, treat it as follows:
  - Cover/saturate the affected area with one of the following chemicals, (easily procured at local retail outlets) hypochlorite (plain chlorinated lime), calcium hypochlorite or plain household bleach. Where solids are visible a layer of soil must be placed as cover after the distribution of the above chemicals.
- Your septic system if properly working prior to the flooding, ponding, ground saturation should operate normally after the ground saturation subsides to below the leach field area. This may take time in some areas.

**For further information call our Land Development office at (951) 955-8980**

\*Document available in an alternate format upon request

OFFICES IN: RIVERSIDE, BLYTHE, CORONA, HEMET, INDIO, MURRIETA AND PALM SPRINGS

For more information call (888) 722-4234

Department Web Site – [www.rivcoeh.org](http://www.rivcoeh.org)