

SEPTIC SYSTEM CARE AFTER THE STORM

Septic systems are most susceptible to issues after periods of heavy rainfall, including after a hurricane. Flooding and power outages may impact the system. Here are some tips on what to look for and how to prevent further issues.

Signs that you may have a problem:

- Standing water or a soggy yard.
- Foul smelling water or odor backing up into the house.
- If the rest of your yard has dried after a few days but your drainfield is still wet.
- Foul odor, your septic tank should not smell if it is doing its job.

The standing water in your yard could be contaminated! Disinfect your hands or any areas that come in contact with the water.

If a problem is detected, take the pressure off your septic system.

- Limit water use until the yard has dried and the septic system has had time to recover.
- Do not pour excess water into your toilet or sink.
- If your system is flooded, do not pump the septic tank. Pumping after the drainfield and surrounding areas have dried will be more effective and healthier for the tank long term.
- Don't dig or compact the soil on your drainfield.
- Once water has receded, inspect your yard around the drainfield for erosion and replace sod or any landscaping that was compromised.

Keep safety in focus when assessing septic tank impacts.

- Use ½ cup of bleach per one gallon of water to disinfect surface areas that may have been contaminated if your septic tank backed up into your home.
- If your area is flooded and you are on a septic tank and use a private well, do not drink the well water without testing it because it may be contaminated. The health department or a state certified water lab can test the water for you.
- Locate electrical or mechanical devices the system may have and avoid contact with them until they are dry.
- In the event of a power outage, examine electrical connections before restoring power to make sure they are dry and safe to operate.

Hire a professional!

Do not work on your septic system yourself. Tanks may contain toxic gases that can be dangerous. UF/IFAS recommends hiring septic tank contractors certified through the Department of Health.

Adapted from: Tory Moore, "Septic system care after the storm," UF/IFAS blog post, August 2020

