

## AFTER THE FLOOD: Septic Tank Failure

During a flood or heavy rainstorm, excessive water can accumulate in leach field, leach line, or seepage pit areas causing the septic system to become sluggish, to back up, or to stop functioning when toilets are flushed or when other plumbing fixtures are used. ***If the septic system was operating properly prior to flooding, household waste water should not overflow onto the surface of the ground.***

### *If a sewage backup occurs:*

When a sewage backup occurs in your residence or business, or when sewage overflows onto the surface of the ground, ***the following must be done until the flooding or ground saturation dissipates:***

- if there is a backup or visible overflow of sewage onto the ground, ***immediately stop all water usage***. Once the flooding and groundwater saturation diminishes, the septic system should again operate normally.
- if the system is slow or sluggish, ***but still operating***, minimize the amount of liquids and solids put into the system.

***If you operate a food facility and experience a septic system failure:*** immediately contact the Department of Environmental Health at 408 918-3400 for cleanup instructions.

### *If the septic tank is above the flood point:*

- ✓ The tank can be ***pumped*** by a permitted liquid waste hauler/pumper (*see Yellow Pages under "Septic Tanks and Systems"*).
- ✓ The septic system can be used as a ***holding tank*** and will continue to accept household waste water and not overflow into leach lines unless the tank is full — most septic tanks will hold up to 1,000 gallons or more (*the amount of waste water per person per day from showers, dishwashing, laundry, etc., averages 50-100 gallons every 24 hours—a family of four would, therefore, produce 200-400 gallons each day*).

### *What if sewage has overflowed in my house?*

- Wash all contaminated areas with detergent and water, then rinse with a sanitizing solution made from ***one tablespoon household bleach*** (5.25% sodium hypochlorite) ***to each gallon of water***. (*1 tablespoon = 3 teaspoons or ½ fluid ounce*)
- Be sure to clean and sanitize all contaminated areas — pay special attention to cooking utensils, work surfaces, children's toys, and surface areas such as floors and walls which family and pets may come in contact

### *If the septic system is flooded or the ground is saturated so that waste water is not accepted:*

- ✓ ***Pumping*** the tank ***will not be effective*** since the flooding/saturation will fill the tank as quickly as it is pumped.
- ✓ Use a ***portable chemical toilet*** — small units are available from camping, RV, and hardware stores. Larger chemical toilets, such as those used at construction sites and festivals may be rented; these units are recommended for apartments, condos, and office buildings (*see Yellow Pages under "Toilets-Portable"*). The functioning toilet facilities of a motorhome, travel trailer, or a neighboring home can also be used.
- ✓ If portable chemical toilets are ***unavailable***, use large extra-strength trash bags (*double bagged*) as liners in toilets, or contain waste in water tight plastic or metal containers with tight fitting lids. Use household disinfectant (*such as bleach*) for odor control. Final disposal can be by sanitary sewer (*when notified by public officials*) or by burial once flood waters have receded.