

FLOOD ADVICE FOR USERS ON SEPTIC TANKS

This advice is for members of the public and operators responsible for dealing with septic tanks during flooding. If your septic tank is waterlogged and will not drain, consider the following options.

Whilst there is general flooding in your area

- While a flood is in progress homeowners are advised to eliminate all non-essential water use and flush toilets as little as possible. Continue to do this until the ground is no longer flooded. The Waterwise website has quick tips on reducing water use in the home. See <https://waterwise.org.uk/>
- Although this is unlikely to be sustainable in the long term, it may be necessary to arrange to have your septic tank emptied and the contents removed by a contractor on a regular basis until the ground is no longer flooded.
- Before having your tank emptied get advice from your drainage contractor as in some circumstances emptying the tank can cause mud or silt to be drawn into the tank or, in extreme cases, result in it lifting out of the ground.

If your septic tank system becomes covered with water

- If the area where your septic tank and / or drainage field is located becomes covered with water, if possible do not use the system at all and avoid contact with any standing water that may contain sewage. Continue to do this until the septic tank and / or drainage field is no longer covered in water and make arrangements to have your tank emptied if the situation allows (see above).
- Consider hiring temporary portable toilet services.

Short term actions

- Ensure there are no surface water or clean water connections to the dirty water system. This will reduce effluent volume. It is usually acceptable to dispose of clean surface water via a drainage field or stream without treatment.
- Keep away from the septic tank drainage area, as standing water/wet ground/ponded water may contain untreated sewage. Avoid doing works until the ground conditions are suitable.
- Public Health England publish information relating to safeguarding your health during floods: <https://www.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/public-health>

Long term actions

- Consider connecting to the public foul sewer if possible. Your local sewerage undertaker will be able to provide details on applications for this connection.
- Keep your system well maintained, so it's better able to cope in extreme weather.
- Consider more appropriate siting of the septic tank and soak-away, away from areas associated with flooding / waterlogging if available.
- Consider an improved treatment option which can be discharged directly to surface water, removing the need for an infiltration system. For further information on environmental permits see the Environment Agency website:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/discharges-to-surface-water-and-groundwater-environmental-permits>

After the flooding event

- Inspect the system for signs of damage and to determine if removal of silt or debris is required, then take any actions required. An appropriately qualified contractor may be needed to inspect and take action.
- Where surface water or groundwater flooding results in pollution or amenity problems from septic tanks or package treatment plants serving more than one property, and where these cannot be overcome by repairing or maintaining your existing system, your sewerage undertaker may have a duty to provide a public sewer under s101A, Water Industry Act 1991.

Sources of further information:

- [British Water: List of British Water Accredited Service Engineers](#)
- [British Water: Code of Practice - Guide to the Desludging of Small Wastewater Treatment Systems](#)
- [British Water: Code of Practice – A Guide for Users of Small Wastewater Treatment Systems](#)
- [Treatment and disposal of sewage where no foul sewer is available](#)