

# AFTER A DISASTER



## Recovering Home Wastewater Treatment Systems

- ◆ During and after a disaster such as a hurricane, you need to prevent untreated wastewater from leaving your wastewater system and harming people, animals, and the environment.
- ◆ The proper response depends on the type of disaster and the type of treatment unit you have.

### Flooding

#### During the flood

- ◆ If the system uses electricity, cut off power to the system by turning it off at the main circuit panel.
- ◆ Stop all water from entering the system.
- ◆ Plug any floor drains in the home to prevent water from backing up into the home.

#### After the flood

- ◆ Do not use the wastewater treatment system until the floodwater has receded from all components of the system.
- ◆ Check the system for any signs of damage to its surface, such as:
  - Exposed components
  - Damaged lids
  - Damaged inspection ports
- ◆ If the components are filled with floodwater, call a service provider to check the system for sediment or other debris.
- ◆ Do not pump the tanks empty or below their normal operating level because the ground is usually saturated after a flood. Empty tanks tend to float, which could damage the piping or even cause the tanks to float to the ground surface.

**For a trench distribution system with inspection ports,** the service provider may be able to pump water from the trenches to help the soil dry and aerate.

**For systems that use electrical power,** restarting the system depends on the flood elevation:

- ◆ **If the floodwater covered only the tanks and the components in the tanks,** it may

be possible to restart the system without further evaluating the components.

- ◆ **If the floodwater covered the components on the ground surface** (such as air pumps or panels), have the system inspected by a service provider to determine its condition before using the system or restarting electrical service.

**For a spray distribution system,** the wastewater may not be treated to its normal expected quality.

- ◆ Do not use it for a day or two to allow the microbes in the system to recover and provide proper treatment.
- ◆ Make sure the disinfection treatment component is working correctly.
- ◆ Limit activity in the distribution area while the ground and grass are moist after spray distribution.

### Electrical outages

#### For systems that do not use electricity

- ◆ Conventional septic tank/soil absorption systems will continue to operate properly. Continue using the system.

#### For systems that use electricity

##### During the outage

- ◆ Limit water use to essentials such as toilet flushing and hand washing.
- ◆ Minimize or eliminate laundry, bathing, showering and dishwashing.
- ◆ Stop all water use if the outage is extended or the plumbing begins to drain slowly.

##### Once power is restored

###### After an outage of less than a day

- ◆ Limit laundry and dishwashing if the system has an advanced pretreatment component.
- ◆ If you have minimized water use, your system will probably recover by itself.

###### After an outage of more than a day

- ◆ Do not wash laundry or dishes for a day.
- ◆ Limit shower time and bathwater volume for at least 1 day.

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### ***Recovering Home Wastewater Treatment Systems continued***

- ◆ Allow the system to continue to operate normally until the water level drops to the normal operating level in the system.
- ◆ A time-dosed system may take 24 hours to distribute all the stored water.
- ◆ If the system has a high-water alarm, it may sound when the power is restored, depending on your water usage during the power outage.
- ◆ Silence the alarm if it has a silence switch option.
- ◆ Contact your service provider if the alarm stays on for more than 24 hours.

#### **For an on-demand pumping system (low-pressure or subsurface drip distribution system)**

1. Immediately after the outage, manually control the length of time that the treated wastewater is delivered to the dispersal field. Otherwise, the first dose after the power is restored can overload your system, and untreated wastewater could flow onto your lawn.

2. Check the system design information for the usual dosage and rest times. Allow the pump to operate for its usual dosage time; then turn the power off by flipping the breaker.
3. Wait for the specified rest period; then allow another dosage for the usual amount of time.
4. Continue this pattern until the pump turns off by itself after its normal dosage time.
5. Or, ask your service provider for instructions on how your system should be brought back into operation after a power outage.

#### **For a spray distribution system**

- ◆ Make sure the disinfection treatment component is working correctly.
- ◆ Limit activity in the distribution area while the ground and grass are moist after the treated wastewater is sprayed there.