

WASTEWATER ISSUES FOR FLOOD AFFECTED HOMES

The Department of Health provides the following advice to residents whose homes have been affected by the recent floods.

If overflows from on site wastewater systems affect your property, cleanup of all affected areas will need to occur. All solid waste in affected areas should be removed (inside and outside the home), hard surfaces swept and washed thoroughly with plenty of clean water. The washed areas then should be left to dry out completely. Carpets, furniture or any other items in the home that came in contact with overflows must also be cleaned and washed and let to dry.

Disinfection could be used however it may have adverse effects on lawns and plants and discoloration of driveways or paved areas. Disinfection should be performed in accordance with the manufacturers' recommendations. Wash your hands thoroughly after the cleanup has been completed.

Whenever the water table is high or the wastewater system is threatened by flooding, there is a risk that wastewater will back up into the home. Relieve pressure on the system by using it less and avoid any unnecessary discharges.

Persons living in the home should stay away from affected areas until they have been cleaned up and allowed to dry out completely.

The septic tank system should be professionally inspected and serviced if damage is suspected. Signs of damage include settling or an inability to accept water. Most septic tanks are not damaged by flooding as they are below ground and completely covered. Septic tanks filled with silt and debris should be professionally cleaned as soon as possible after the flood water has subsided. Cleaning a flooded septic tank should be done with caution to prevent flotation as in some cases, pumping the septic tank out could cause the tank to float out of the ground and may damage the inlet and outlet pipes.

If the wastewater disposal area is clogged with silt, it may require pumping out. This may need to be done several times, if the surrounding ground is saturated. Saturated soil is especially susceptible to compaction, which can reduce the disposal area's ability to accept and treat wastewater and can lead to system failure. Avoid compaction of the soil over the wastewater disposal area caused by driving or operating equipment in the area. In extreme cases the disposal area may need to be re-installed.

The highest potential for health problems from wastewater overflows is through ingestion of contaminated products, such as vegetables affected by the overflow. Therefore discard any contaminated food. Vegetables or fruits that came in contact with wastewater and were to be harvested in near future should also be discarded.

For advice regarding pumping out of onsite wastewater systems such as septic tanks and aerobic systems, or for advice on community wastewater management systems, contact your local council. In SA Water sewered areas where sewage overflows have occurred, residents should contact SA water for advice on **1300 883 121 (metropolitan)** or **1300 880 337 (country)**.

For any further advice or queries, the Department of Health can be contacted on **8226 7100**.