

GUIDANCE FOR SEPTIC SYSTEMS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER A POWER OUTAGE

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO PROTECT YOUR HEALTH AND SEPTIC SYSTEM

Safety Reminders

- Get help from a septic system service professional for steps with this symbol .
- Steps with a  only apply to pressure distribution systems.
- Get help from a septic system service professional if any of the steps feel unsafe in your situation or your system loses power.
- Make sure power to the septic system is off before inspecting the area.
- If sewage has backed up, stay out of the affected area until it has been disinfected or the contaminated materials have been removed.
- Wear gloves and eye protection when inspecting your septic system.
- Never enter the pump chamber or septic tank.

Before the Power Outage

Take these steps to reduce the effects of an impending power outage on your septic system.

- Maintain your septic system.
- **Know your septic system and take pictures or keep documents of the following** to reference later if there is damage:
 - Septic tank location.
 - Septic system records or drawings.
 - Electrical components.

- Gravity systems do not require but may include components that require electricity:

- Blowers
- Chemical feeders
- Lights
- Aerobic treatment units
- Sand filters
- Recirculating media filters
- Elevated sand mounds
- Generator (if applicable)

 Pressure distribution systems may include the above components, in addition to:

- Pumps
- Flow equalization tanks
- Low pressure distribution
- Subsurface drip distribution
- Spray distribution
- Peat systems

During the Power Outage

- **Gravity based systems should operate normally** during a power outage. If there are signs of damage call a septic system service professional.

- **If you have a pressure distribution or other system/components that require electricity, reduce water use** and see the guidance below on temporary toilets. Wastewater will collect in the system during the power outage.

- **Reduce water use until the system is inspected:**

- **Take short showers.**
- **Limit laundry and dishwashing.**
- **Turn off the water** while brushing teeth, shaving, or rinsing dishes.
- **Do not flush the toilet** each time it's used for liquid waste.

After the Power Outage

If needed, contact a septic system service professional and follow the steps below.

- **Turn off power to the system** at the circuit breaker and unplug all power cords.

- **Inspect your system and contact a septic system service professional** if any of the issues below are found.

- Damaged piping, risers or manway covers
- Exposed electrical wiring to control boxes
- Unlevel ground
- Damage to the disposal field
- Odor or visible evidence of sewage
- Exposed septic system components
- Settling or breakage away from pipe
- Exposed electrical wiring to pumps

  **If your system has a pump, it may have a high-water alarm that may sound when the power is restored.** You can silence the alarm if it has a silence switch option. If the alarm remains activated for more than 24 hours, contact a septic system service professional.

- **Continue to reduce water use** for several days.

On-Demand Systems

- If the pump is controlled by float controls and is off for more than six hours, follow these steps:

- **Turn off power to the pump** at the circuit breaker while the power is out.
- **When the power is back on, turn the pump on for 5 minutes and off for 6 hours.** The pump may automatically turn off during the first manual dosing.
- **Reduce water use and continue the 5-minute pumping every 6 hours until the pump turns off automatically.**

Timer Systems

The timer system will eventually correct itself once power is restored but be sure **to reduce water use for several days**. If the system does not correct itself, contact a septic system service professional.

OTHER SYSTEMS

If you have an advanced treatment unit or any other type of onsite wastewater treatment system not addressed above, contact a septic system service professional or your local health department.

Temporary Toilets

Only use a temporary toilet if there are no functioning toilets available and the power outage is expected to last several days.

- **Check to see if you can stay somewhere else.**

- **Contract a PortaPotty for temporary use.**

- **Modify your own toilet:**

- **Shut off the water valve** to the toilet. If you can't close it, try another option.
- **Flush out any water still in the bowl.**
- **Line your toilet bowl** (under the seat) with a plastic kitchen garbage bag inside of another kitchen bag.
- **Into the inner bag, put some kitty litter, dry peat moss, lime, or something similar** that will absorb liquid.
- **Do not mix urine and fecal material** if possible.
- **After using the toilet, close the inner plastic bag** with a plastic tie or other method.
- **Wash or sanitize your hands** after toilet use and waste handling.
- **Store full bags in a secure area.** Consider a watertight bucket or trashcan.
- **Dispose of the bags when possible.**

- **Use a five-gallon bucket as a toilet.** You can add a toilet seat and set it up like a modified toilet (above).

- **If you must dig a hole for your waste, make sure it's at least 200 feet** (70 adult steps) from water bodies and at least six inches deep. Fill it in after a single use, tamp the dirt down. This is a short-term option only and regulations may vary by jurisdiction.