

Septics Edition

First Flush, "tIssue" #6

Winter 2010-11

Help! I'm Flooded!

Rain and flooding can be part of life here on the Olympic Peninsula. What impact does all of this rain and flooding have on your septic system? Typically, rainfall does not impact most septic systems. If you live in an area where flooding happens often, that could be a problem. The following are some tips, borrowed from a U.S. EPA publication entitled "*Septic systems—What to do after the flood.*"

- Try to minimize using your septic system while there are flood waters over the tank and drainfield.
- Have the septic tank pumped as soon as possible **after the flood has receded**. Be sure to pump both the septic tank and pump tank. This will remove silt and debris that may have washed into the system. Do not pump the tank during flooded or saturated drainfield conditions. Pumping it could cause the tank to become buoyant and float out of the ground, which may damage the inlet and outlet pipes or seals. At best, pumping the tank is only a temporary solution.
- Have your septic tank serviced if you suspect damage. Signs of damage include settling of the ground above or near the tank or riser, or an inability to accept water. Most septic tanks are not damaged by flooding since they are below ground and completely covered. However, septic tanks and pump chambers can fill with silt and debris, and must be professionally cleaned. If the *drainfield* is clogged with silt, a new one may need to be installed to avoid wastewater surfacing and causing environmental and public health hazards.
- Only certified pumpers or maintenance providers should pump and inspect septic tanks. Contact Environmental Health for a list of licensed septic system contractors who work in your area.
- If sewage has backed up into the basement or house, clean the area carefully and disinfect the floor. Use a chlorine solution of a half cup of chlorine bleach to each gallon of water to disinfect the area thoroughly.

• More information may be found at: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/weather.htm#flood>

- Do not compact the soil over the drainfield by driving or operating equipment in the area. Do not dig into the tank or drainfield area while the soil is still wet or flooded. Saturated soil is especially susceptible to compaction, which can reduce the drainfield's ability to treat wastewater and lead to system failure.
- Examine all electrical connections for damage before restoring electricity.
- Be sure the septic tank riser or manhole cover is secure and that inspection ports have not been blocked or damaged.



Septic flooding may occur from excessive rainfall or rising streams or groundwater. Photo: <http://www.hertsmere.gov.uk/advicebenefits/emergencies/flooding.jsp>

- Check the vegetation over your septic tank and drainfield. Repair erosion damage and sod or reseed areas as necessary to provide turf grass cover.
- Flooding of the septic tank will lift the floating crust of fats and grease in the septic tank. Some of this scum may have floated and/or partially plugged the outlet tee. If the septic system backs up into the house check that the outlet pipe in the tank is not blocked. Have your pumper clean your outlet filter if you have one.
- Clean up any floodwater in the house without dumping it into the sink or toilet and allow enough time for the water to recede. Floodwaters from the house that are passed through or pumped through the septic tank will cause higher flows through the system. This may cause solids to transfer from the septic tank to the drainfield and will cause clogging.

Did You Know?

Wells can be affected by flooding, too. Do not drink water from a flooded wellhead until it tests negatively for bacteria. The Clallam County Environmental Health (CCEH) Laboratory analyzes water samples for bacteria including E. coli. Sample bottles may be obtained from the CCEH counter at the courthouse, Sequim City Hall, or Forks Health Department. Samples for bacteriological or other testing must be turned in according to the schedules posted at:

http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/water_testing.html
(or call 417-2258).

If the first bacteriological test is positive, you should re-test. If the re-test is also positive, CCEH provides complete instructions for disinfecting a well using common household bleach at:

http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/water_disinfecting.html

Clallam County Onsite Program & Other Stewardship Websites

Onsite septic systems in general:	http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/onsite.html
Past "Septics Edition" newsletters:	http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/ehnewsletter1.html
"Septics 101" class information:	http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/onsite_septic101.html
Water info and links:	http://www.clallam.net/features/water.html
Waste management:	http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/solidwaste.html



The Water Column

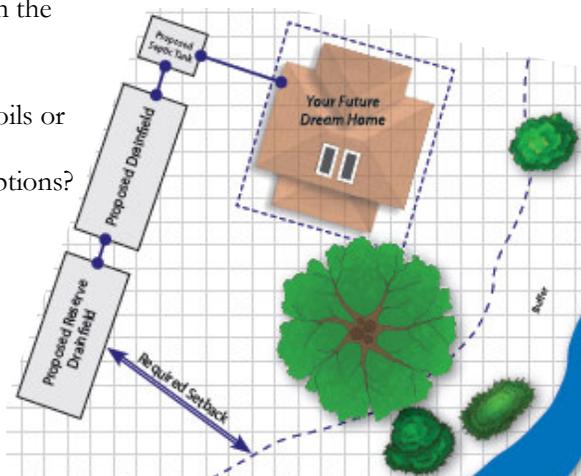
This issue of the Clean Water Herald addresses rainfall and flooding concerns, and how your property and investments may be impacted. Of course, it's best when these potential impacts are considered before development starts, to avoid costly problems if (or when) nature takes its course. If you're starting a project, you probably have a good idea where you'd like to build and how the structure might look. To get your development (or re-development) off on the right foot, consider the following:

- Do you know what types of development are allowed in the land-use zone you're in?
- Is there a water system or sewer system you can connect to?
- What are the natural drainage characteristics—do you have well-drained soils or fine silt-clay that causes ponding and runoff?
- Are there “critical area buffers” or other considerations that affect your options?

Educate yourself about site-specific elements such as these early in the design process and save yourself time and money – not to mention headaches – and help protect the environment that you wish to call home.

Clallam County has a brochure that will help you find answers to these important questions and more. It may be found at:

<http://www.clallam.net/Permits/environmental.html>



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The address used is the taxing address on record in the Clallam County Assessor's Office for one or more properties that are (or are likely, according to land use information) utilizing an onsite septic system.

**Puget Sound
Starts Here**



WINTER CALENDAR

The Clean Water Herald is a periodic newsletter sponsored by members of the Clean Water Work Group, to inform and promote good stewardship of our shared natural resources.

The “**Septics Edition**” series will be published quarterly through 2011 by the friendly staff at Environmental Health Services, a division of the Clallam County Health & Human Services Department.

Contact us at the courthouse, 360-417-2258, or visit www.clallam.net/envhealth.

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Printed on 30% post-consumer content recycled paper.

Septics 101 Online

A 30-minute video and quiz are now available, through the link below. When you've completed the course and quiz, print and save your Certificate of Completion.

Take Septics 101 online or register for in-person classes at

http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/onsite_septic101.html

(if you don't have internet, register by leaving a message at 360-417-2529)

Septics 101 In-Person

Jan. 13

6:00—8:30pm

Sequim Prairie Grange
290 MacLeay Rd, Sequim

Septics 101 In-Person

Feb. 24

6:00—8:30pm

Sequim Prairie Grange
290 MacLeay Rd, Sequim

Septics 201 Planned release in late 2011

Also known as **Do-It-Yourself (DIY) inspection training**. This class will, pending pilot test results, train the homeowner how to perform a certified inspection of their septic system.