



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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ADPH offers information for residents with septic tanks and private wells during floods

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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During heavy rains and floods such as those currently being experienced in Alabama, the ground can become saturated. Residents who use an onsite sewage disposal system (a septic tank system) may be experiencing performance problems due to these rain-soaked conditions.

The Alabama Department of Public Health offers the following suggestions that may provide some relief during this time:

- Limit water usage when possible by reducing toilet flushing, dishwashing, clothes washing and showering.
- Consider laundering at commercial establishments, as this will significantly reduce the demand on your own system.
- Inspect disposal areas for depressions where rainwater ponding may occur. Adding soil to these depressions will aid in surface drainage.
- Inspect roof draining and gutters to ensure that rainwater run-off is diverted away from the disposal area.
- Consider having your septic tank pumped out. This may provide temporary relief and may help with maintenance for long-term system performance. The Alabama Department of Public Health recommends having your septic tank pumped out every three to five years to eliminate sludge build-up.

After weather conditions improve, the system should return to normal functioning. If you continue to experience problems with your system, contact your local health department environmentalist for assistance.

Signs that a septic system is not working properly include the following:

- Sinks drain slowly
- Toilets drain slowly

- Floor drains overflow
- Sewage becomes visible outside the home

Precautions related to septic systems include:

- Avoid contact with any septic system electrical devices until they are dry and clean.
- Do not pump out the septic tank more than halfway or the tank may float out of the ground.
- Reduce all nonessential water use (for example, dishwashing, clothes washing, showering).
- Flush toilets as little as possible or use a temporary toilet.

If you suspect septic system damage, get the system professionally inspected and serviced.

Well Water Precautions

Severe flooding can put drinking water wells at increased risk for contamination from floodwater that may contain sewage. Avoid contact with any standing water that may contain sewage. Persons in areas where there may have been flash floods should test their private water wells before consuming water from them.

Private wells that have been covered by flood water should be assumed to have been contaminated. Do not drink water from your well or feed it to your animals until you have tested it and have received a satisfactory test result.

Sample kits may be obtained from the local health departments and state health department laboratories, which are equipped to sample well water for bacteriological contamination. Once a satisfactory sample is obtained, the well should be monitored by continued sampling to ensure the quality of the water supply.

Until water is known to be free of contaminants, residents should only use clear water which has been brought to a full boil for one minute.

Contact your health department (<http://adph.org/administration/assets/countylist.pdf>) for a list of septic system contractors who work in your area.