



WALLA WALLA COUNTY
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PERSONAL HEALTH, WIC, AND ADMINISTRATION: 314 W MAIN (ROSE STREET ENTRANCE)
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EMERGENCY PROCEDURES FOR PEOPLE LIVING ON INDIVIDUAL WELLS AND SEPTIC SYSTEMS

FLOODING

In the event that your property is flooded the Walla Walla County Health Department has developed these general guidelines for a person/family living on a well and septic system.

The first thing that you should do when your property is flooded is to avoid using the well for any purpose that includes drinking, washing, cooking or cleaning. Also, do not use the septic system including flushing the toilets or using the sinks to dispose of any liquids.

If you have any questions about this topic feel free to call the Health Department at 509.524.2662

Below are some additional recommendations/frequently asked questions about your well and septic system:

Septic:

Do I pump my tank during flooded or saturated drainfield conditions?

No! At best, pumping the tank is only a temporary solution. Under worst conditions, pumping it out could cause the tank to try to float out of the ground and may damage the inlet and outlet pipes. The best solution is to plug all drains in the basement and drastically reduce water use in the house.

What do I do with my septic system after the flood?

Once floodwaters have receded, there are several things homeowners should remember:

- Do not use the sewage system until water in the soil absorption field is lower than the water level around the house.
- Have your septic tank professionally inspected and serviced if you suspect damage. Signs of damage include settling 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 soil absorption field is clogged with silt, a new system may have to be installed.
- Only trained specialists should clean or repair septic tanks because tanks may contain dangerous gases. Contact your health department for a list of septic system contractors who work in your area.
- If sewage has backed up into the basement, clean the area 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.

Emergency Disinfection of Wells that have been Flooded

Before Disinfection: Check the condition of your well. Make sure there is no exposed or damaged wiring. If you notice any damage, call a professional before the disinfection process.

Materials Needed:

- One gallon of non-scented household liquid bleach;
- rubber gloves;
- eye protection;
- old clothes; and
- a 5 gallon bucket.

Step 1

If your water is muddy or cloudy, run the water from an outside spigot with a hose attached until the water becomes clear and free of sediments. **Excessively muddy or cloudy water will greatly reduce the efficiency of the disinfecting chemical.**

Step 2

Determine what type of well you have and how to pour the bleach into the well. Some wells have a sanitary seal with either an air vent or a plug that can be removed (a). If it is a bored or dug well, the entire cover can be lifted off to provide a space for pouring the bleach into the well (b).

Step 3

Take the gallon of bleach pour it into the 5 gallon bucket and then add water from an outside hose to the 5 gallon bucket. Mix the two together and carefully pour the mixture down into the well casing.

Step 4

Turn the pump on and off a couple of times to mix the bleach water with the well water.

Step 5

Turn on all cold water faucets, inside and outside of house, until the chlorine odor is detected in each faucet, then shut them all off. If you have a water treatment system, switch it to bypass before turning on the indoor faucets.

Step 6

Wait 6 to 24 hours before turning the faucets back on. It is important not to drink, cook, bathe or wash with this water during the time period --- it contains high amounts of chlorine.

Step 7

Once the waiting period is up, turn on an outside spigot with hose attached and run the water into a safe area where it will not disturb plants, lakes, streams or septic tanks. Run the water until there is no longer a chlorine odor. Turn the water off.

Step 8

The system should now be disinfected, and you can now use the water.

Step 9

Have your water tested for bacteria 7 to 10 days after disinfection. Call the Health Department at 509.524.2662 before sampling to find out about picking up sample containers and the times and days when testing is available.