

Septic System Performance in Flooded and Soggy Soil Conditions

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If you have a septic system, it is important to watch your home water use during periods of heavy precipitation and flooding. Septic systems rely on the soil's ability to disperse wastewater effluent. But when there is flooding, the soil is saturated, so household plumbing will not drain properly and septic systems will fail. When soils are saturated by flooding or heavy precipitation, homeowners should conserve as much water as possible. As Figure 1 shows, there are a number of areas where homeowners can cut back on water use.

Here are some suggestions on how to reduce your wastewater flow:

- Stay at a hotel or with relatives or friends until the water recedes.
- Shower at another location, such as work, the gym, or a friend's home.
- Do not launder clothes at home.
- Flush toilets only when necessary.
- Repair any leaking pipes or faucets.
- Use paper plates and disposable utensils to avoid washing dishes.

If surface water is present over your lawn or adjacent lawns, stay away from these areas as much as possible. During floods, surface water can become contaminated from your, and your neighbors', wastewater.

For more information about soils and septic system performance and water use, see Purdue Extension publication HENV-7-W, Indiana Soils and Septic Systems (<http://www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/HENV/HENV-7-W.pdf>), and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems Manual (<http://www.epa.gov/ORD/NRMRL/Pubs/625R00008/625R00008.htm>).

Figure 1. Typical water use in homes per person (EPA, 2002).

