



After the Flood

Frequently Asked Questions of the Conservation Authority and the Ottawa Septic System Office

Flooding Related Questions Applicable to All Structures

What steps should I take if I need to repair my house after the flood?

- Check with the municipality regarding the requirement for a building permit for your project.
- Your property is most likely in an area regulated by your local Conservation Authority (i.e., river or stream valley, inland lake shorelines, hazardous lands, watercourses and wetlands). If minor building repairs are required such as replacing flooring or drywall, then permits or approval will not be required from the Conservation Authority.
- If repairs, reconstruction or renovation including, foundation repair, reconstruction or replacement, outer wall construction, deck replacement, additions or other structural change or alteration to the residence, then review, permits or approval will be required from the local Conservation Authority.
- Review/approvals may also be required for any repairs, modifications, reconstruction relating to property grading, auxiliary buildings, shoreline retaining walls and/or dock structures.

- Flood waters can weaken walls or even ceiling structures. If you are concerned or suspect that the structural integrity of your home may be compromised, leave the area and contact a structural engineer to assess the situation.

What steps do I take to dispose of garbage and debris from my lawn, or basement?

- Do not place debris in the river. Please contact your local municipality for disposal options.

What steps do I take to dispose of sand and/or sand bags from my property?

- Do not place sand in the river or on the shoreline. Please contact your local municipality for disposal options.

Flooding Related Questions Applicable to All Types of Septic Systems

What steps should I take if my septic system is flooded?

- It is strongly recommended that the system should not be used while the septic drain field or tanks are covered with water. The sewage system should not be used until the water in the septic drain field is below the distribution pipes.
- If the system must be used, conserve water as much as possible while the system attempts to restore itself as the ground water table falls.
- Flood water may be contaminated with sewage. Protect yourself by wearing protective equipment such as gloves, protective eyewear, a face mask and rubber boots. Be sure to wash your hands frequently with soap and water.
- Do not pump your septic tank. Pumping out a septic tank that is sitting in saturated soil may cause it to “pop out” of the ground. Newer systems are more likely to pop out than older systems because the soil may not have completely settled and compacted around the septic tank.
- Try to avoid using any heavy machinery near the septic drain field or tanks in a saturated state, as they are especially vulnerable to damage under flooded conditions.
- If sewage has backed up into a basement, clean the area and disinfect the floor. Use a chlorine solution of a half cup of chlorine bleach to a gallon of water when mopping the floor.
- If you have a ground water well, do not drink the water until water testing proves it to be safe for consumption.

Contact Us

Rideau Valley Conservation Authority
3889 Rideau Valley Drive, P.O. Box 599
Manotick, ON K4M 1A5
T 613-692-3571 | F 613-692-0831
info@rvca.ca | www.rvca.ca

Ottawa Septic System Office
3889 Rideau Valley Drive, P.O. Box 599
Manotick, ON K4M 1A5
T 613-692-3571 | F 613-692-0831
info@rvca.ca | www.rvca.ca/osso



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What steps should I take if I have a pumped system?

- Do not operate the pump until floodwaters have receded and the groundwater table is below the pump chamber bottom/floor. Operating the pump to empty the chamber during high water events may cause the pump chamber to “pop out” of the ground due to buoyancy forces.
- Avoid contact with any electric pump or equipment that may have been submerged during the flood. Have a licensed electrician inspect all electrical equipment before they are returned to normal operation.

What steps should I take if I have an Advanced Treatment Unit (for example: Ecoflo, Waterloo Biofilter, Puraflo, etc.)?

- If you have an Advanced Treatment Unit, the system should not be used until the maintenance provider or licensed septic installer has verified proper system operation.
- Do not pump treatment tanks until floodwaters have receded and the groundwater table is below the bottom/floor of the treatment tank. Pumping the tank during high water events may cause the pump chamber to “pop out” of the ground due to buoyancy forces.

What should I do if I'm having septic problems after the floodwaters recede?

- Do not pump out your septic tank until water levels recede below the bottom/floor of the tank. At best, pumping the tank is only a temporary solution. Under worst conditions, pumping it out could cause the tank to “pop out” of the ground due to buoyancy forces and may damage the inlet and outlet pipes.
- Have your septic tank professionally inspected by a licensed septic installer or licensed sewage hauler if you suspect damage. Signs of damage include visible settling of the ground above the tank or an inability of the system to accept additional water. Most septic systems are not damaged by flooding since they are below ground and completely covered. However, septic tanks and pump chambers can fill with silt and soil and must then be cleaned. If the soil absorption field is clogged with silt, a new system may have to be installed as there is no effective way to clean out the buried lines in an absorption field.
- Have your tanks cleaned and/or repaired by a licensed septic installer or licensed sewage hauler as the tanks may contain dangerous gases and pathogens.

What should I do with my outhouse?

- Ensure that the outhouse is still positioned over the pit. If the outhouse has been washed away, or collapsed, cover the open pit with sturdy boards to prevent accidents and the spread of disease. If water is in the pit, add two litres (two quarts) of unscented liquid chlorine bleach every three to four days until the water disappears.

When do you contact the OSSO or other Septic Regulator?

- You must contact the OSSO or your local septic system Approval Agency for any repair or replacement of your sewage system. No permit is required for replacing electrical components such as pumps, control panels, etc.

