



Sewage Back-Ups – Private Sewage Disposal Systems

Sewage contains bacteria and viruses that can make you sick. Immediate action is important. Mould is less likely to grow if a back up is cleaned, and surfaces and furnishings are dried within 48 hours.

What should I do immediately after a sewage backup?

- While the back-up is occurring, avoid flushing toilets or using other plumbing fixtures that could increase the size of the back-up or make the area more difficult to clean.
- Have a vacuum truck remove as much of the waste water as possible, and empty the septic tank or holding tank.
- Stay out of sewage floodwater as much as possible, especially near electrical lines or outlets. Turn off power at the breaker box if there is standing water or the possibility of wires getting wet. Ask your electrical utility for help if needed.

IMPORTANT STEPS FOR CLEANING UP SEWAGE:

1. ***Wear personal protective equipment***

- Put on protective wear including a long sleeve shirt, safety glasses or goggles and rubber gloves. Take extra care to protect any cuts or sores from getting infected.
- Always wash hands with soap and clean water after cleanup activities or after handling articles contaminated by sewage.
- Keep pets and children away from the affected area until it has been thoroughly cleaned.

2. ***Remove and discard sewage soaked materials that cannot be cleaned***

- Sewage soaked items such as mattresses, pillows, stuffed toys and paper products that cannot be cleaned should be placed in a sealed plastic bag and discarded.
- Do not eat any food that has been in contact with sewage. If you are unsure whether an item is spoiled or contaminated with sewage flood water, throw it out.

3. ***Remove any sewage and solids from the area.***

- Have a vacuum truck remove as much of the waste water as possible, and empty the septic tank or holding tank

4. ***Clean all affected non-porous surfaces using warm, soapy water.***

5. ***Sanitize clean surfaces to eliminate contamination.***

- Spray or wipe all surfaces with a bleach solution (1 part household bleach in 9 parts water). Do not add soap or any other cleaners to the solution.
- Ensure the bleach solution remains on the surface for at least 10 minutes to ensure items are properly sanitized.

6. **Ensure the affected area is thoroughly dried to prevent mould growth.**
 - Open doors, windows, and use mechanical fans or dehumidifying equipment.
7. ***Prevent the tracking of sewage into the living space.***
 - Thoroughly wash hands, clothing, personal protective equipment, and cleaning equipment (ex: buckets, mop). Sanitize equipment with the same bleach solution used for surfaces.
8. ***In order to prevent future back-ups, occupants have a role to play in proper operation and maintenance of private sewage disposal systems.***
 - Ensure the sewage pump is plugged in at all times, and that power is supplied to the outlet.
 - Grass and vegetation around the septic tank should be kept short.
 - Avoid putting large amounts of grease or other foreign materials (ex: wipes, paper towel, food, feminine hygiene products, etc.) down the sewer pipes.
 - If your home is connected to a holding tank, call the vacuum truck whenever the high level alarm goes off. Limit water usage until the tank is emptied.

For more information on cleaning sewage back-ups or maintenance of private sewage disposal systems, contact the local Environmental Health office.

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