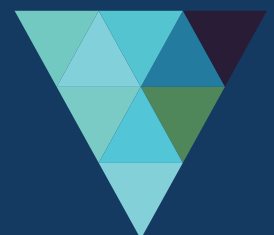


# ***ONSITE SEWAGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (OSMS)***

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What to do  
after the flood?

Richmond  
Valley  
Council



## Onsite Sewage Management Systems (OSMS) - What to do after the flood?

This document provides information and advice on OSMS (septics, Aerated wastewater Treatment Systems [AWTS], Reed Beds etc.) and Land Application Area (LAA) care after a flood in the Richmond Valley Council (RVC) Local Government Area (LGA). All home owners are required to be aware of and comply with the conditions outlined in their Approval to Operate (ATO) documents issued by RVC.

### FAQ'S

#### **Do I pump my tank during flooded or saturated LAA conditions?**

No! At best, pumping the tank is only a temporary solution. Under flooded/saturated conditions (when the surrounding ground is saturated), pumping it out could cause the tank to float out of the ground and may damage the inlet and outlet pipes. The best solution is to drastically reduce water use in the house.

Only pump out your system using a licenced and suitably qualified pumpout operator, when it is safe to do so and when there is no risk of a tank popping out of the ground.

#### **What if my septic system has been used to dispose wastewater from my business (either a home-based or small business)?**

In addition to raw sewage, small businesses may use their septic system to dispose of wastewater containing chemicals. If your septic system that receives chemicals backs up into or around your home or LAA take extra precautions to prevent skin, eye and inhalation contact. The proper clean-up depends on what chemicals are found in the wastewater. Contact RVC or your service technician for specific clean-up information.

#### **What do I do with my OSMS (septic, AWTS etc.) 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 LAA is lower than the water level around the house.
- Have your OSMS inspected and serviced by a qualified plumber if you suspect damage has occurred. Signs of damage can include gurgling from plumbing fixtures, and/or the inability to drain water properly.
- AWTS with electrical equipment such as pumps, aerators, PLCs, control boards, and alarm systems are likely to be damaged and inoperable after inundation with flood water. Always engage a suitably qualified electrician to inspect your system.
- Septic tanks may or may not be damaged by flooding as they do not have electrical components. However, septic tanks and pump chambers can fill with silt and debris. Once safe to do so, the tanks should be cleaned by a suitably qualified person. If the LAA is clogged with silt, a new LAA may need to be installed.
- Reed beds may require: the inlet and outlet manifolds to be checked for blockages, replacement of any washed-out gravel and the replanting of reeds.

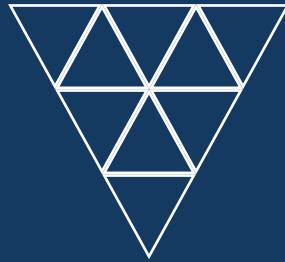
- Your local pumpout contractor can be found in the online yellow pages or contact RVC for a list of these contractors.
- Be sure the septic tank's manhole cover and lids are secure and that inspection ports have not been blocked or damaged
- If sewage has backed up into the home, clean the area and disinfect the floor. If using disinfectants or other cleaners, follow safety advice on labels and do not touch your face (especially your eyes).

(Ensure that proper PPE is worn at all times and always wash hands thoroughly afterwards)

- As soon as possible and once safe to do so (non-saturated), have the septic system pumped out. Be sure to pump the tank, any pump wells and the LAA if possible. Do not pump the tank during flooded or saturated conditions.
- Do not drive on or over the LAA at any time, especially after a flood, this may cause irreparable damage. Saturated soil is especially susceptible to compaction, which can reduce the LAA's ability to treat wastewater and lead to system failure.
- Repair any damage to the LAA caused by erosion and reseed areas to provide grass cover, where necessary.
- Composting toilet humus should not be removed and disposed of during flood conditions. Once the ground is no longer saturated, resume as per your Approval to Operate.

**NOTE.** Prior to inspecting or working on an OSMS always ensure that the proper PPE is worn. (Gloves, eye protection), and that the system is checked for any dangers to persons or animals. Damaged and old tanks, tank lids and manhole covers can collapse and lead to serious injury or death.

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