



SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

# Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems Responding to Power Outages and Floods

Wastewater from your home contains sewage from your toilet and grey water from your bathroom, kitchen and laundry. Wastewater contains human disease-causing microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses and parasites. Diseases can be transmitted to humans from wastewater if appropriate measures are not taken. The safe disposal of wastewater is therefore essential to protect your health and the health of others. Ensure children and pets are kept away from wastewater.

Electrical power outages and floods can impact your onsite wastewater system (septic tank system). During power outages and floods, wastewater treatment can be limited and pose health concerns and hazards if not managed appropriately.

## Power Outages

### **During a power outage -**

- Limit water usage to essentials such as toilet flushing and hand washing. Laundry, bathing, showers, and dishwashing should be minimized or eliminated during the power outage.
- Don't let the water run while brushing teeth, shaving or rinsing dishes.
- Don't flush the toilet each time it's used for liquid waste (where possible).
- The septic tank can hold about one-day's supply of waste. Once the tank is filled, additional waste can back up into your home.
- Stop all water use if electrical outage is extended for more than one day or the plumbing begins to drain slowly.
- Slow-draining plumbing may indicate that the reserve capacity in the tank is exceeded and the system is full.
- If the system has a pump, turn off the pump at the control panel. Effluent will continue to build up in the pump chamber until it resumes operation.
- Your wastewater system will have the capacity to store approximately one day of household wastewater in the tank before it reaches capacity. Once capacity has been reached, wastewater will begin to back up into the pipes and eventually will end up in the home if water is continually used.

### **Once power is restored -**

- Continue to conserve water for 24-48 hours to allow your system to catch-up and return to normal.
- Allow the system to continue to operate normally until the water level recedes in the system. A time dosed system may take a 24-hour period to have all of the stored water distributed and the high-water alarm deactivated.
- Many systems are equipped with a high-water alarm. This alarm may sound when the power is restored based on your water usage during the power outage. You can silence the alarm if it has a silence switch option. If the alarm remains activated more than 24 hours, contact your service agent.
- If you have an operation manual for your system, refer to the manual for directions on restarting your system.
- If you are unsure about the operation of your system, contact your service provider, plumber or Council's Environmental Health Team for further assistance.

## **Flooding**

*If flood waters have affected your property, your onsite wastewater system may also be affected.*

### **During a flood –**

- Discontinue electrical power to the system by turning off power at the main circuit panel.
- Stop water usage going into the system because of the potential for limited treatment.
- Plug any floor drains in the home connected to the wastewater treatment system to prevent water from backing up through the system and into the home.

### **After a flood –**

- Do not use the system until the flood water has receded from all components of the wastewater system.
- Inspect the parts of the system you can see from the surface for any signs of damage (i.e. exposed components be cause soil has washed away and damage to lids or inspection ports).
- Contact your plumber or service agent to check the system for sediment or other debris if the system components are filled with flood water.
- Do not pump the tanks empty or below their normal operating level because the ground will usually be saturated after flooding and empty tanks are buoyant and will try to float out of the ground. This upward force can make the tanks shift resulting in damaged piping or even cause them to float to the ground surface.

### **Identifying if your onsite wastewater system has failed –**

Failed systems are not easy to identify; however, some simple indications may include:

- a pungent odour around the tank and land application area
- blocked fixtures and wastewater overflowing from the relief point
- high sludge levels within the primary tank
- sewage flowing up through the toilet and sinks.

Some onsite wastewater treatment systems may rely on mechanical and electrical equipment such as pumps, aerators and filters. This equipment may be damaged by flood or loss of power. To prevent injury or further damage to your system contact your service agent.

**Further information can be found on Council's website or by contacting Council's Environmental Health Team on 5662 9200.**