

Council Bluffs Health Department
209 Pearl St.
Council Bluffs, IA 51503
(712) 328-4666

What do I do with my septic system after the flood?

Once floodwaters have receded and the water table has dropped, there are several things homeowners should remember:

- If you are on well water, do not drink the water until it is tested. Test kits are available at the Council Bluffs Health Department.
- Do not use the sewage system until water in the soil absorption field is lower than the water level around the house.
- Have your septic tank professionally inspected and serviced. Signs of damage include settling or an inability to accept water. Most septic tanks are not damaged by flooding since they are below ground and completely covered. However, septic tanks and pump chambers can fill with silt and debris, and must be professionally cleaned. If the soil absorption field is clogged with silt, a new system may have to be installed.
- Only trained specialists should clean or repair septic tanks because tanks may contain dangerous gases. (List of approved contractors below.)
- If sewage has backed up into the basement, clean the area and disinfect the floor. Use a chlorine solution of a half cup of chlorine bleach to each gallon of water to disinfect the area thoroughly.
- Pump the septic system as soon as possible after the flood. Be sure to pump both the tank and lift station. This will remove silt and debris that may have washed into the system. Do not pump the tank during flooded or saturated drainfield conditions. At best, pumping the tank is only a temporary solution. Under worst conditions, pumping it out could cause the tank to try to float out of the ground and may damage the inlet and outlet pipes.
- Do not compact the soil over the soil absorption field by driving or operating equipment in the area. Saturated soil is especially susceptible to compaction, which can reduce the soil absorption field's ability to treat wastewater and lead to system failure.
- Examine all electrical connections for damage before restoring electricity.
- Be sure the septic tank's manhole cover is secure and that inspection ports have not been blocked or damaged.
- Check the vegetation over your septic tank and soil absorption field. Repair erosion damage and sod or reseed areas as necessary to provide turf grass cover.

State Registered Tank Cleaners for Pottawattamie County:

Aksarben Pipe and Sewer Cleaning, 2230 S. 27th, Omaha, NE 68105 (402) 342-1215
Council Bluffs Septic System, P.O. Box 1073, Council Bluffs, IA 51502 (712) 328-3416
3-T Inc., 333 Lincoln Ave., Council Bluffs, IA 51503 (712) 328-1178
Roto Rooter, 7941 Drexel St., Ralston, NE 68172 (405) 592-2700
American Pumping Service, Inc., 2626 9th Ave., Council Bluffs, IA 51501 (712) 353-7467