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# News Release

June 7, 2010

**FOR  
IMMEDIATE  
RELEASE**

## **SAFETY PRECAUTIONS WHEN FLOODING OCCURS**

As heavy rainfall continues, homeowners should make general preparations to keep their family safe from the threat of flooding. Whereas controlling rainfall or eradicating flooding is beyond our control, Southwest District Health offers homeowners tips to respond appropriately to health hazards that may arise during emergency flooding.

“In our rural counties, we are particularly concerned with private sewage systems and domestic wells,” stated David Loper, Director of Environmental Health Services for Southwest District Health.

Loper explained that bacterial contamination of drinking water is very common when private water supplies are compromised with flood water. Water supplies that are contaminated with bacteria can cause gastrointestinal illness. In addition, when flooding conditions occur, private sewage systems cannot function properly and may cause hazardous situations for homeowners.

Loper outlined general preparations to take to keep your family safe when flooding is threatening.

### **PREPARING FOR FLOODING**

To prepare for a flood you should:

Make sure all septic tanks are full of liquid. The high-water season is not the time to have tanks pumped; empty tanks are buoyant and may “pop” out of the ground during flooding.

If necessary, plug floor drains to keep sewage from backing up into the basement, but be aware that floodwaters may still enter the basement through cracks and seams.

### **DURING A FLOOD**

Discontinue use of your private sewage system. When necessary, shut off power to a sewage lift pump if you have one in the house or in a pump chamber (mound, in-ground pressure, at-grade systems).

Remember that a well may become contaminated during a flood. Therefore,

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DO NOT DRINK THE WATER until it has been tested and you know that it is safe. Drink bottled water, or disinfect water before drinking. If your private water supply is flooded you can take steps to disinfect the well. Call Environmental Health Services at Southwest District Health for instructions, at (208) 455-5400 and/or visit their website at <http://www.swdh.org>.

Do not bathe or swim in floodwater. It may contain harmful organisms.

### **AFTER THE FLOOD**

Do not use the sewage system until water in the disposal field is lower than the water level around the house.

If you suspect damage to your septic tank, have it professionally inspected and serviced. Signs of damage include settling or inability to accept water. Most septic tanks are not damaged by a flood since they are below ground and completely covered. However, sometimes septic tanks or pump chambers become filled with silt and debris, and must be professionally cleaned. If tile lines in the disposal field are filled with silt, a new system may have to be installed in new trenches. Because septic tanks may contain dangerous gases, only trained specialists should clean or repair them.

Discard any items that are damaged by contaminated water and cannot be steam cleaned or adequately cleaned and disinfected.

Do not pump water out of basements too quickly. Exterior water pressure could collapse the walls.

If flood water backs up in a basement, clean the area and disinfect the floor with a chlorine solution of one-half cup of chlorine bleach to 1 gallon of water.

If your well was submerged by flood water, do not use the water without boiling or treating until your well is tested. If you need to disinfect your well, or would like information on testing your well water, contact Southwest District Health at (208) 455-5400.

For more detailed information about flood recovery, the Centers for Disease Control provides essential tips to help you recover from a flood at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods>; Reentering Your Flooded Home [www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/reenter.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/reenter.asp); and Protect Yourself from Mold [www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/protect.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/protect.asp), or call CDC at 800-CDC-INFO (English and Spanish) or 888-232-6348 (TTY).

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**NOTE TO EDITOR: Please see attachments for Preparing for Floods Fact Sheet and Disinfecting Domestic Wells**