



### Onsite Wastewater Systems and Flood Damage

The North Carolina Septic Tank Association wants to make sure our members and their customers are exercising safe and sound operation and maintenance of their septic tank system while the flooding and damage due to Hurricane Helene becomes evident.

The immediate damage of flooding places a great deal of stress on the dispersal system. Saturation of the soil means the wastewater cannot be dispersed in the trenches adequately. In addition, saturated soil places more load on the septic tank itself. In many cases, the onsite wastewater system and the soils are resilient and recover after the flooding and the dispersal area dries. The best thing at this point is to limit water usage. ACTION POINT #1: LIMIT YOUR WATER USAGE.

As things recover there will be a great deal of clean up due to the flooding. Household cleaners, such as bleach, should not be placed down the drain. Doing so, concentrations of bleach solutions in certain quantities will alter the needed biological activity in the septic tank. ACTION POINT #2: DO NOT POUR BLEACH AND OTHER DISINFECTANTS DOWN THE DRAIN.

A lot of homeowners will want to have the septic tank pumped out so that they can have capacity in the tank. It is suggested that the septic tank NOT be completely emptied. An empty tank may become dislodged and pop up due to the lift pressure of the flood water, or the tank could crack or collapse due to the pressure of the saturated soils pressing against the tank sidewalls. If the septic tank requires pumping, then pump the tank to a halfway point to allow outlet filter servicing (on systems permitted starting in 1999). ACTION POINT #3: AVOID PUMPING OUT THE ENTIRETY OF THE SEPTIC TANK. IF THERE IS AN EFFLUENT FILTER, THEN SERVICE THE FILTER.

Some of the onsite systems have two tanks, a septic tank connected to a pump tank. The pump tank will have electrical controls above ground that may have been damaged during the flood. A knowledgeable septic service provider may need to assess the condition of the control panel and ensure proper functioning. ACTION POINT #4: DO NOT ATTEMPT TO INSPECT ANY ELECTRICAL PANELS AND PUMPS UNLESS TRAINED AND KNOWLEDGEABLE.

While the flooding may disappear, the area of the dispersal field will still be saturated. ACTION POINT #5: DO NOT ALLOW VEHICULAR OR MECHANICAL EQUIPMENT ON THE DISPERSAL FIELD OR ATTEMPT TO REPAIR A DISPERSAL FIELD WHEN THE GROUND IS STILL SATURATED.

Many onsite wastewater systems are also on sites with a private well. In those cases, contact your local health department and have the well tested. During flooding the well may have been contaminated. ACTION POINT #6: IF THERE IS A PRIVATE DRINKING WATER WELL AT THE HOME, CONTACT THE LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT TO HAVE IT INSPECTED PRIOR TO USE.

*A reminder to all: A septic system is a major investment for the property it serves.*