**What to Do If Your Septic System Fails**

**Why septic systems fail**

Most septic systems fail because of inappropriate design or poor maintenance. Some soil-based systems (with a leach or drain field) are installed at sites with inadequate or inappropriate soils, excessive slopes, or high ground water tables. These conditions can cause hydraulic failures and water resource contamination.

Failure to perform routine maintenance, such as pumping the septic tank at least every three to five years, can cause solids in the tank to migrate into the drain field and clog the system.

**Whom to contact if you have problems with your septic system**

Contact your local health department or regulatory agency. You can find the telephone number for your local health department in your local phone directory.

You can use online searchable databases of installers and septic system service providers to find a professional in your area:

The [National Association of Wastewater Transporters](http://www.nawt.org/) [**Exit**](https://www.epa.gov/home/exit-epa) can provide more assistance.

**What to do if your basement floods**

If sewage from your plumbing fixtures or onsite system backs up into your basement, avoid contact with the sewage and the harmful pathogens it might contain. Contact your local health department or regulatory agency. Cleanup personnel should wear protective clothing (e.g., long rubber gloves, face splash shields).

After cleanup is complete, wash all equipment, tools, and clothing used in the cleanup and the flooded basement area thoroughly. Disinfect them with a mixture of 90 percent water and 10 percent household bleach. The area should be dried out with fans, heat lamps, or other devices and not used until it has been completely dry for at least 24 hours. See more information on [what to do after flooding from a natural disaster event.](http://water.epa.gov/drink/emerprep/flood/septicsystems.cfm)

**Whom to contact for information on septic systems**

The National Small Flows Clearinghouse has a Technical Assistance Hotline that can be accessed toll free at (800) 624-8301 or (304) 293-4191.

[Contact Us](https://www.epa.gov/septic/forms/contact-us-about-septic-systems) to ask a question, provide feedback, or report a problem.