

# » flood events on-site sewage management systems

**OSSM Factsheet 15**

PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 2017



## » Flood events and on-site sewage management systems

During a flood or high rainfall event it is likely that your On-Site Sewage Management (OSSM) system will not function due to surface or groundwater infiltration into the tank and/or over saturation of the soil where the treated wastewater (effluent) is being applied to the land.

A flooded OSSM system may cause sewage to back-up inside the sanitary drainage pipework and surcharge in the home and render the plumbing fixtures un-operational. Flooded septic tanks may have been filled with silt and require a pumpout by an authorised wastewater pumpout contractor.



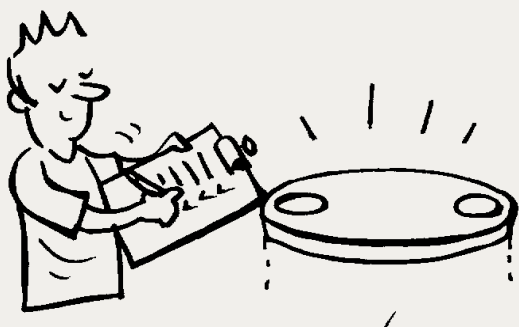
## » Things to do - checklist:

Prior to doing any checks on your OSSM system ensure that adequate personal protective equipment is worn. For example gum boots, long pants, mouth/nose mask, eye protection and gloves. Disease-causing organisms (pathogens) in wastewater can cause serious illness such as hepatitis;

- **Limit the use of plumbing fixtures and the amount of wastewater generated.** The effluent land application area (ie septic trenches) will not absorb the effluent until the land dries and groundwater drops below the level of absorption trenching. Temporary alternative arrangements for sanitary amenities may be required.
- **Contact a suitably qualified person (ie NSW licenced plumber and drainer) to check your OSSM system and carry out emergency works to make your system operational.** If you have an Aerated Wastewater Treatment System (AWTS) or alternative system then contact your service agent to inspect and rectify as needed. Electrical supply to the AWTS may need to be isolated until flooding recedes and a licenced electrician engaged to check componentry and affirm that the system is operational before reuse.

**See next page for more information...**

## » Things To Do - Checklist (cont):



- **When flooding recedes determine if the OSSM tank needs to be pumped out and if so contact an authorised wastewater pumpout contractor to perform this work.** Caution is required when pumping out tanks as the tank may float/pop out of the ground when empty due to high ground water levels. Consult your plumber or service agent before pumpout and to supervise the refilling of the AWTS.
- **Floodwater (including effluent) may have contaminated your vegetable or herb garden.** Disinfecting, peeling and cooking is recommended to prevent food borne illness. The NSW Food Authority has more information about what produce can be salvaged after a flood. If in doubt throw it out.
- **Listen to public announcements about town drinking water supply and if safe to use.** If you have a private water supply ie rainwater tank or groundwater bore, then these supplies should be tested for drinking water quality before using. Boiling or using bottled water for temporary drinking and cooking use is recommended.
- **If the home has been flooded and internal cleaning is needed,** then ensure you dispose of disinfectant liquids in an appropriate manner and do not flush these chemicals down drains that will flow into the OSSM or stormwater drainage systems.
- **The stagnant water left behind by floods and rain also provides an excellent breeding ground for mosquitoes,** increasing the risk of the mosquito-borne diseases such as Ross River virus and Barmah Forest virus. Ensure all surface ponding water around the home is drained or backfilled and empty or discard containers that could hold water.



*Aerated Wastewater Treatment System – flooded and no power supply to pumps.*

## » Note....

If your OSSM system has been significantly damaged beyond maintenance works then a new installation (or any alterations to the existing OSSM system) will need to be approved by Council in accordance with current regulations before any works can commence.



**If you have any questions or concerns please contact:**

Ballina Shire Council, Development and Environmental Health. Phone 6686 1210