

Septic Tank System Educational Handout

HELP! My sewage just backed up into my house! What do I do now?



First, don't panic! Turn off any faucets, dishwashers, washing machines, etc. to stop any more water from entering the plumbing system. Any cleaner labeled "disinfectant" (Lysol, Pine Sol, etc.) or a 10% bleach solution (1 part bleach to 9 parts water) should be used to clean up after a plumbing back up. Any affected carpets should be steam cleaned. If the drain backing up is not at a lower elevation relative to the other house drains (i.e. the bathroom on the second floor is backing up but all the drains on the first floor seem fine), chances are it is due to a clog in the internal plumbing of the house. Contact a plumber to evaluate your situation.

If the back-up is at a lower elevation or is the closest drain to the septic tank then the issue may be with the septic system. The lid of the septic tank should be uncovered and the inspection ports opened. **The normal level of liquids in the tank is about a 1 foot below the lid.** If the level is lower or equal to this, then the problem may be a clog in the pipes leading to the septic tank. A plumber should be called if this is suspected. If the level is higher than this, then the wastes are getting to the tank but the liquids are not being passed to the absorption field. If there is a filter on the outlet end of the tank (typical in tanks installed after 1997), check to see if the filter is clogged. If you remove the filter, replace it after cleaning to prevent large items from entering your absorption field. If the filter is clogged, it can be easily pulled out and hosed off to unclog it. If the filter is not clogged, contact a licensed septic pumper to have the tank pumped out and/or check the pipe from the septic tank to the absorption field for clogs or damage. Contractors should not jet the line between the tank and the drainfield.

Should the system back up again within a couple of weeks of having the tank pumped, then the problem is likely with the absorption field. Contact your local Environmental Health Department, one of our inspectors will be happy to advise you in how to obtain a repair permit.



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What is a level 3 soil report and when is one required?

A soil report is a report completed by Georgia certified soil classifier. The classifier will come to the property and take soil samples by boring with a hand auger. These samples should extend to a depth of at least 6 feet or less if the soil conditions are not suitable for septic systems. Based on the color, texture and other characteristics of the soil, the classifier can determine what limitations the soil may have. An environmental health specialist can then take that information and determine what type of septic system would be permissible given the soil properties.



A level 3 soil report is required for all new construction on properties served by septic, when converting a property from residential to commercial use, when a septic system has failed within 5 years of installation, when the footprint of existing buildings structures are changed, or when soils issues are discovered during a septic system repair. *A level 3 soil report is strongly suggested any time a septic system fails.*

If you have any questions, please contact your local Environmental Health Office.

