

**March 13, 2009**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE    CONTACT: Maureen Pfund, Director Environmental Health  
MONROE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

The Monroe County Health Department would like to provide advice to those homeowners who have water wells and/or onsite waste water systems that may have been affected by the recent flooding events.

Also please visit our web site at [www.co.monroe.mi.us/publichealth](http://www.co.monroe.mi.us/publichealth) to obtain information on how to clean up a flooded basement.

### **What do I do with my septic system after the flood?**

Once floodwaters have receded, there are several things homeowners should remember:

- Do not drink well water until it is tested. Contact your local health department.
- Do not use the sewage system until water in the soil absorption field is lower than the water level around the house.
- Have your septic tank professionally inspected and serviced if you suspect damage. Signs of damage include settling or an inability to accept water. Most septic tanks are not damaged by flooding since they are below ground and completely covered. However, septic tanks and pump chambers can fill with silt and debris, and must be professionally cleaned. If the soil absorption field is clogged with silt, a new system may have to be installed.
- Only trained specialists should clean or repair septic tanks because tanks may contain dangerous gases. Contact your health department for a list of septic system contractors who work in your area.
- If sewage has backed up into the basement, clean the area and disinfect the floor. Use a chlorine solution of one half cup of chlorine bleach to each gallon of water to disinfect the area thoroughly.
- Pump the septic system as soon as possible after the flood. Be sure to pump both the tank and lift station. This will remove silt and debris that may have washed into the system. Do not pump the tank during flooded or saturated drainfield conditions. At best, pumping the tank is only a temporary solution. Under worst conditions, pumping it out could cause the tank to try to float out of the ground and may damage the inlet and outlet pipes.
- Do not compact the soil over the soil absorption field by driving or operating equipment in the area. Saturated soil is especially susceptible to compaction, which can reduce the soil absorption fields ability to treat wastewater and can lead to system failure.
- Examine all electrical connections for damage before restoring electricity.
- Be sure the septic tank's manhole cover is secure and that inspection ports have not been blocked or damaged.
- Check the vegetation over your septic tank and soil absorption field. Repair erosion damage and sod or reseed areas as necessary to provide turf grass cover.

**Remember: Whenever the water table is high or your sewage system is threatened by flooding there is a risk that sewage will back up into your home. The only way to prevent this backup is to relieve pressure on the system by using it less.**

### **What should I do if my Well has Flooded?**

#### **Why should I be concerned?**

Surface waters are susceptible to many sources of contamination. This is particularly true during a flood event where sewage runoff and overflow from lakes, rivers, and streams may be carrying bacteria such as E. Coli and cholera, protozoa

such as Giardia, and viruses such as hepatitis. If surface water enters your well, it may contaminate the water that you rely on for drinking, cooking, washing and bathing.

#### **What should I do to protect my family from contaminated well water?**

If there is a flooding event in your area, your county health department may issue a precautionary boil water notice through your local television, radio, and newspapers. In general, if flood waters have reached your well, or if you notice any change in the appearance or taste of your water, or even if you are unsure about the impact of flooding on the water quality in your area, you should boil all of the water you use for drinking, making beverages, cooking, brushing your teeth, washing dishes, and washing areas of the skin that have been cut or injured. The water should be brought to a rolling boil for at least one minute and then cooled as necessary. Bottled water may also be used for all of these purposes.

#### **Is my water safe to drink after the flooding subsides?**

No—If your well has been flooded, you must disinfect it and contact your county health department for information on how to sample your water and where to take the sample for bacteriological testing.

#### **How do I disinfect my well?**

If you have a 5" PVC well casing, the following steps may be performed by the homeowner to disinfect the well. (If you do not have a 5" PVC well casing, a well driller should be contacted to disinfect the well.)

- If the water is discolored, turn on a garden hose and run until the water is clear.
- Add 1 quart of unscented household bleach to 5 gallons of water.
- Remove the well cap and carefully move the wiring bundle to the side.
- Pour the chlorine solution into the well.
- Place a garden hose into the well and rinse down the casing and internal parts for 10 to 15 minutes. Replace the well cap.
- Inside the house, turn on each water tap until you smell chlorine.
- Turn off each tap, and allow to sit for a minimum of 8 hours (overnight if possible)
- To flush the system, turn on a garden hose and direct it away from the well and septic. Allow to run for 5-6 hours.
- After flushing, turn on each tap inside the house and run the water until there is not chlorine odor.
- Collect a bacteriological water sample 2-3 days after chlorinating.

#### **Is it safe now?**

The only way to verify that the water is safe to drink is to have it tested. Although chlorine bleach is effective against microorganisms, it will not remove chemical contamination that may have entered your well.

For further information, contact the Monroe County Health Department Environmental Health Division at (734) 240-7900; toll free (734) 354-5500.

**Monroe County, Michigan,**  
For more information on the MCHD Program please contact :