

Water Quality and Floods

Floods can have disastrous impacts on people and property, including loss of life, destruction of houses and other buildings, and displacement of those whose homes are flooded.

Floods can also have dire effects on public health and the environment, particularly water quality. Containers with hazardous materials may be displaced and their contents spill into lakes and streams. Wastewater and septic systems may be overloaded and compromised. Contaminated flood waters may seep into ground water, which supplies drinking water for 95% of Idaho citizens.

Homeowners and businesses can help minimize the consequences of floods to public health and the environment. The purpose of this brochure is to provide guidance on how to protect water quality before, during, and after a flood strikes.

Through education and planning, we can minimize flood-related threats to public health and the environment.

For More Information

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality Regional Offices

Boise Regional Office
1445 North Orchard
Boise, ID 83706
(208) 373-0550
toll-free: (888) 800-3480

Coeur d'Alene Regional Office
2110 Ironwood Parkway
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814
(208) 769-1422
toll-free: (877) 370-0017

Idaho Falls Regional Office
900 N. Skyline, Suite B
Idaho Falls, ID 83402
(208) 528-2650
toll-free: (800) 232-4635

Lewiston
1118 F Street
Lewiston, ID 83501
(208) 799-4370
toll-free: (877) 541-3304

Pocatello
444 Hospital Way #300
Pocatello, ID 83201
(208) 236-6160
toll-free: (888) 655-6160

Twin Falls
650 Addison Ave. W,
Suite 110
Twin Falls, ID 83301
(208) 736-2190
toll-free: (800) 270-1663

Public Health Districts

Panhandle Health District
8500 N. Atlas Road
Hayden, ID 83835
(208) 415-5200

North Central District Health
215 10th Street
Lewiston, ID 83501
(208) 799-0353

Central District Health
707 North Armstrong Place
Boise, ID 83704
(208) 375-5211

South Central District Health
1020 Washington Street N.
Twin Falls, ID 83301
(208) 734-5900

Southeastern District Health
1901 Alvin Ricken Drive
Pocatello, ID 83201
(208) 233-9080

Eastern Idaho Public Health District
1250 Hollipark Drive
Idaho Falls, ID 83401
(208) 522-0310

Southwest District Health
13307 Miami Lane
Caldwell, ID 83607
(208) 455-5300

Water in Idaho

Emergency Preparedness: Protecting Water Quality Before, During, and After a Flood Strikes



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Hazardous Materials: Follow these precautions before a flood occurs

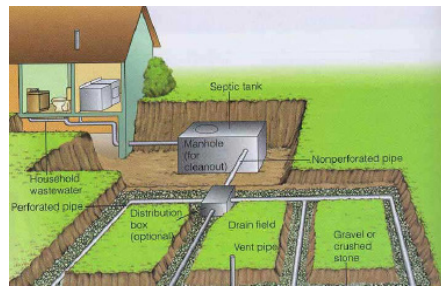
One of the most common problems after a flood is displacement of drums, tanks, and other containers that hold hazardous materials. To minimize contamination from these types of containers, follow these precautions:

- Clearly **identify and label contents** of tanks, drums, or other containers, especially when materials are placed in other than original containers.
- Place your **name and address** on larger fuel and propane tanks to facilitate identification of their contents and their return if they become displaced.



- Place free-standing fuel tanks and/or compressed gas tanks where they are **least susceptible to flood waters**. Also, when possible, anchor these items to prevent them from being displaced.

- Store drums and smaller containers in areas that are least susceptible to rising and receding flood waters. When possible, **contain in fenced areas, cabinets, or storerooms**.
- Make sure containment vaults for underground storage tanks have been engineered properly to **prevent tanks from floating out of the ground** if contents are lighter than water.
- Minimize the amounts and types of materials kept on the premises. **Purchase only what you need**. Properly dispose of excess materials at hazardous waste collection centers. Contact the Idaho State Department of Agriculture to periodically dispose of old, expired, or unwanted agricultural chemicals.



Wastewater and Septic Systems: Plan ahead to address a flood event

Wastewater and septic systems can become overloaded during floods, which can result in the spread of bacteria and other contaminants into the surrounding area, drinking water wells, and other waters. Follow these tips to address flood damage:

- Identify at what water level your system can become compromised and **prepare an emergency response plan**.
- Do **not pump your tank** when the drainfield is flooded or saturated. Pumping could cause the tank to float out of the ground and may damage the inlet and outlet pipes. The best solution is to **plug all drains in the basement** and **drastically reduce water use** in your house during the flood.
- 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, a new system may have to be installed or the wastewater diverted to a replacement drainfield if one exists.

Drinking Water: Make sure the water you drink is safe

During a flood, surface waters that inundate an area may contaminate drinking water wells and systems. Follow these precautions:

- If your private well is flooded, **assume the water in your home is contaminated**.
- It is recommended that you **have your well tested for bacteria and other contaminants** before returning it to service. Direct questions about testing to your public health district (see contact information on back of this brochure).
- Use care around electrical connections. **Have the well's wiring system checked** by a qualified electrician, well contractor, or pump contractor.
- While water is being tested, if you choose to drink water from your well, **boil or treat the water to kill harmful bacteria and parasites**. Bring water to a rolling boil for one minute to kill most organisms. Or you may prefer to **drink bottled water** from a reliable source.
- Infants and pregnant women should use bottled water instead of boiled tap water for drinking and cooking. Boiling concentrates levels of nitrate in water. Use **bottled water for preparing infant formula** for children six months of age and younger.
- Do **not use contaminated water** to wash dishes, brush teeth, wash and prepare food, or make ice.
- If you are on public water, **listen for public announcements** on the safety of the municipal water supply. The water system will let you know through local media if your water is not safe.

