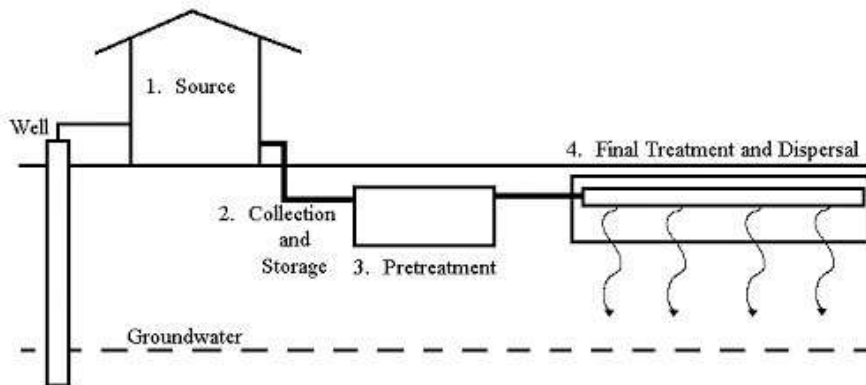


Power Outages and Sewage Treatment Systems

Electrical power outages may affect the operation of your home sewage treatment system. Sewage treatment systems operate either by gravity, or involve the use of pumps and valves that require electricity. You will need to determine which type of system serves your home.



Components of an onsite wastewater treatment system.

A gravity collection system feeding into a septic tank and gravity distribution into leaching trenches or the soil absorption area will continue to operate properly and you will be able to continue using your system. You may use buckets of water (from a pond, stream or other similar source) to manually flush the toilet.

If your system contains components that require electricity to operate, the wastewater will collect in the septic tank, treatment unit or dosing tank during the electrical outage and will have to be treated and dispersed when electrical service resumes. Such components include:

1. Aerobic treatment units and recirculating media filters
2. Pump chambers to leaching (soil absorption) trenches
3. Sand filters
4. Dosing or flow equalization tanks
5. Low pressure distribution
6. Subsurface drip distribution

What can you do while the power is out?

- ⇒ Limit water usage to essentials such as toilet flushing and hand washing. Laundry, bathing, showers, and dishwashing should be minimized or eliminated during the power outage. Don't let the water run while brushing teeth, shaving or rinsing dishes. Don't flush the toilet each time it's used for liquid waste.
- ⇒ The septic tank can hold about one-day's supply of waste. Once the tank is filled, additional waste can back up into your home.
- ⇒ Stop all water use if electrical outage is extended or the plumbing begins to drain slowly. Slow-draining plumbing may indicate that the reserve capacity in the tank is exceeded and the system is full.
- ⇒ If the system has a pump, turn off the pump at the control panel. Effluent will continue to build up in the pump chamber until it resumes operation.
- ⇒ **CAUTION:** Do not enter the pump chamber. Gases inside pump chambers are poisonous and the lack of oxygen can be fatal. Always turn off the power supply at the circuit breaker, and unplug all power cords before handling the pump or floats to prevent electric shock. The service or repair of pumps and other electrical equipment must be done by an experienced person.

What should you do once power is restored?

- ⇒ Contact your service provider or a licensed electrician if you are unsure or uncomfortable working with the components. Your service provider will plug in any electrical equipment that was unplugged during the outage. Always be careful when working with electrical components to prevent shock.
- ⇒ If you have an operation manual for your system, refer to the manual for directions on restarting your system.
- ⇒ If your system is demand dosed, (waste is pumped out to a treatment unit or soil as the tank becomes full), the pumping system can be manually operated to disperse the stored wastewater to the soil absorption field (leaching trenches). Manually operating the dosing system may be necessary to avoid overloading your soil absorption system following the first dose after the restoration of power. Your system can be dosed manually by:
 - When the power is restored, turn the pump 'on' for 2 minutes and 'off' for 4 – 6 hours. You are now "dosing" the right amount of effluent into the drainfield over a given period of time. If there was little water use during the power outage, the pump may automatically turn off during the first manual dosing.
 - Conserve water and continue the 2-minute pumping every 4 – 6 hours until the pump turns itself off.
- ⇒ If your system is time dosed, allow the system to continue to operate normally until the water level reduced in the system. A pump system with a timer controls the number of times the pump starts and stops. It manages how much effluent (liquid sewage from the septic tank) goes into the soil absorption field (leaching trenches) in a 24-hour time period. Timers make sure that the soil absorption field only gets as much effluent as it was designed to handle. The timer system will eventually take care of itself once the

power is restored. If the power has been off for awhile, the timer will be behind. In order to let your timer catch up, continue to conserve water for an additional day or more.

- ⇒ System components that require electricity are usually equipped with a high water alarm. This alarm may sound when the power is restored based on your water usage during the power outage. You can silence the alarm if it has a silence switch option. If the alarm remains activated more than 24 hours, contact your service provider.
- ⇒ If you are unsure about the operation of your system, contact your service provider, system manufacturer, or your local health district for assistance.

Information provided by: *Ohio Department of Health Bureau of Environmental Health*