GUIDANCE FOR SEPTIC SYSTEMS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER A POWER OUTAGE
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STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO PROTECT YOUR HEALTH AND SEPTIC SYSTEM

- Gravity systems do not require but may include components that require electricity:
  - Blowers
  - Chemical feeders
  - Lights
  - Aerobic treatment units
  - Sand filters
  - Recirculating media filters
  - Elevated sand mounds
  - Generator (if applicable)

- Pressure distribution systems may include the above components, in addition to:
  - Pumps
  - Flow equalization tanks
  - Low pressure distribution
  - Subsurface drip distribution
  - Spray distribution
  - Peat systems

Safety Reminders

- Get help from a septic system service professional for steps with this symbol 🔄.

- Steps with a 🔄 only apply to pressure distribution systems.

- Get help from a septic system service professional if any of the steps feel unsafe in your situation or your system loses power.

- Make sure power to the septic system is off before inspecting the area.

- If sewage has backed up, stay out of the affected area until it has been disinfected or the contaminated materials have been removed.

- Wear gloves and eye protection when inspecting your septic system.

- Never enter the pump chamber or septic tank.

During the Power Outage

- Gravity based systems should operate normally during a power outage. If there are signs of damage call a septic system service professional.

- If you have a pressure distribution or other system/components that require electricity, reduce water use and see the guidance below on temporary toilets. Wastewater will collect in the system during the power outage.

- Reduce water use until the system is inspected:
  - Take short showers.
  - Limit laundry and dishwashing.
  - Turn off the water while brushing teeth, shaving, or rinsing dishes.
  - Do not flush the toilet each time it's used for liquid waste.

Before the Power Outage

Take these steps to reduce the effects of an impending power outage on your septic system.
- Maintain your septic system.
- Know your septic system and take pictures or keep documents of the following to reference later if there is damage:
  - Septic tank location.
  - Septic system records or drawings.
  - Electrical components.
After the Power Outage

If needed, contact a septic system service professional and follow the steps below.

- **Turn off power to the system** at the circuit breaker and unplug all power cords.
- **Inspect your system and contact a septic system service professional** if any of the issues below are found.
  - Damaged piping, risers or manway covers
  - Exposed electrical wiring to control boxes
  - Unlevel ground
  - Damage to the disposal field
  - Odor or visible evidence of sewage
  - Exposed septic system components
  - Settling or breakage away from pipe
  - Exposed electrical wiring to pumps

- If your system has a pump, it may have a high-water alarm that may sound when the power is restored. You can silence the alarm if it has a silence switch option. If the alarm remains activated for more than 24 hours, contact a septic system service professional.
- **Continue to reduce water use** for several days.

**On-Demand Systems**

- If the pump is controlled by float controls and is off for more than six hours, follow these steps:
  - **Turn off power to the pump** at the circuit breaker while the power is out.
  - **When the power is back on, turn the pump on for 5 minutes and off for 6 hours.** The pump may automatically turn off during the first manual dosing.
  - **Reduce water use and continue the 5-minute pumping every 6 hours until the pump turns off automatically.**

**Timer Systems**

The timer system will eventually correct itself once power is restored but be sure **to reduce water use for several days.** If the system does not correct itself, contact a septic system service professional.

**OTHER SYSTEMS**

If you have an advanced treatment unit or any other type of onsite wastewater treatment system not addressed above, contact a septic system service professional or your local health department.

**Temporary Toilets**

Only use a temporary toilet if there are no functioning toilets available and the power outage is expected to last several days.
- Check to see if you can stay somewhere else.
- Contract a PortaPotty for temporary use.
- Modify your own toilet:
  - **Shut off the water valve** to the toilet. If you can't close it, try another option.
  - **Flush out any water still in the bowl.**
  - **Line your toilet bowl** (under the seat) with a plastic kitchen garbage bag inside of another kitchen bag.
  - **Into the inner bag, put some kitty litter, dry peat moss, lime, or something similar that will absorb liquid.**
  - **Do not mix urine and fecal material if possible.**
  - **After using the toilet, close the inner plastic bag** with a plastic tie or other method.
  - **Wash or sanitize your hands** after toilet use and waste handling.
  - **Store full bags in a secure area.** Consider a watertight bucket or trashcan.
  - **Dispose of the bags when possible.**
- **Use a five-gallon bucket as a toilet.** You can add a toilet seat and set it up like a modified toilet (above).