



Onsite Wastewater Treatment System (OWTS) – AFTER A WILDFIRE

The Onsite Waste Water Treatment System (OWTS) can be damaged during a fire resulting in possible pollution if not repaired properly. Use the guidance below when returning home to assess the condition of your property and OWTS after a fire in order to protect your health and ensure the proper function of your OWTS. Visit smchealth.org/landuse for more information.

GENERAL SAFETY TIPS:

- ✓ **Fall Hazards.** Be careful walking near a damaged system. The septic tank, a component of the OWTS, have riser lids that may be covered by debris, missing, and damaged which may cause the structure to be unstable resulting in falls.
- ✓ **Rope off your septic system.** Prevent falls by marking the area as a potential hazard.
- ✓ **Never enter** the pump chamber or septic tank.
- ✓ Burned structures may also be damaged and should not be entered until cleared by an inspector.
- ✓ **Shut system power off** or verify power is shut down before inspecting the area.
- ✓ **Have your OWTS inspected** by a qualified OWTS professional before using it again. Any repairs to the OWTS requires a permit through San Mateo County Environmental Health Services.

DAMAGED SYSTEMS:

- ✓ **Contact a qualified OWTS service professional.** A list can be found at smchealth.org/landuse.
- ✓ **Stay out of the area if sewage backs up.** If the entire building is contaminated, abandon the building until all affected areas have been cleaned.
- ✓ Try to find other toilets if your septic system is damaged. If there are no toilets available, see the guidance on temporary toilets below.
- ✓ **Reduce water use and avoid pumping water to the septic system** until the system is inspected.
- ✓ Re-route water from roof gutters away from the drain field area.
- ✓ **If you have a pressure distribution system and your pump was not removed, an OWTS service professional will need to inspect and repair the pump.**
- ✓ **Shallow plastic piping associated with the OWTS can be damaged by intense heat or by heavy firefighting vehicles.** It would be prudent to have a qualified OWTS professional evaluate the integrity of your OWTS after a fire prior to using it again. Key points of evaluation include the septic tank, diversion valve, shallow piping, and dispersal trench standpipes. Surfacing effluent or wet areas along the alignment of OWTS elements may indicate damaged piping.



TEMPORARY TOILETS

If your OWTS is damaged, try to find other toilet facilities. See below for other alternatives if no functioning toilets are available.

- ✓ **Check to see if you can stay somewhere else.**
- ✓ **Contract with a portable toilet company (porta-potty) for temporary use.**
- ✓ **Modify your own toilet:**
 - Try shutting off the water valve to the toilet. If you cannot close it try another option.
 - Flush out any water in your bowl.
 - Under the seat, line your toilet bowl with a plastic garbage bag inside of another garbage bag.
 - Into the inner bag put some kitty litter, dry peat moss, or other liquid absorbing material.
 - To limit odors and for safer disposal of waste, avoid mixing fecal and urine material as much as possible.
 - After using the toilet, tie the bags, and wash/sanitize hands after waste handling.
 - Store the bags in a secure area (e.g. water tight bucket or trashcan) and properly dispose when possible in an approved manner e.g. sanitary sewer.
- ✓ **Using a five-gallon bucket method.** Add a toilet seat and set up using toilet modification instructions above.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- ✓ **Drawings or diagrams.** These items may be important in the debris removal program.
- ✓ OWTS service professionals list can be found at: smchealth.org/landuse.