



April 14, 2006

**PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release**

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**District Health Outlines Precautions When Flooding Occurs**

Runoff from high levels of snowfall has just begun and as rainfall continues, homeowners should make general preparations to keep their family safe from the threat of flooding. Whereas controlling rainfall or eradicating flooding is beyond our control, South Central District Health offers homeowners tips to respond appropriately to health hazards that may arise during emergency flooding.

“In our rural counties, we are particularly concerned with private sewage systems and domestic wells,” stated Rene LeBlanc, Director of Environmental Health Services for South Central District Health.

LeBlanc explained that bacterial contamination of drinking water is very common when private water supplies are compromised with flood water. Water supplies that are contaminated with bacteria can cause gastrointestinal illness. In addition, when flooding conditions occur, private sewage systems cannot function properly and may cause hazardous situations for homeowners.

In general, LeBlanc cautions to always wash your hands with soap and water, from non-contaminated water sources or water that has been boiled before preparing or eating food; after toilet use; or following flood clean-up activities. In addition, LeBlanc outlined general preparations to keep your family safe when you expect flooding.

**Preparing for Flooding**

To prepare for a flood you should:

- Stock food and water for your family and your pets.
- Make sure all septic tanks are full of liquid. The high-water season is not the time to have tanks pumped; empty tanks are buoyant and may “pop” out of the ground during flooding.
- If necessary, plug floor drains to keep sewage from backing up into the basement, but be aware that floodwaters may still enter the basement through cracks and seams.
- In the City of Gooding, tanks which supply water to city residents sit above ground and should be safe from flooding. However, Gooding citizens who live in the county or along the river may experience problems with their wells and septic tanks becoming flooded.

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## South Central District Health

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*Keeping your family & community healthy*

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#### During a Flood

- Discontinue use of your private sewage system. When necessary, shut off power to a sewage lift pump if you have one in the house or in a pump chamber (mound, in-ground pressure, at-grade systems).
- Remember that a well may become contaminated during a flood. Therefore, **DO NOT DRINK THE WATER** until it has been tested and you know that it is safe. Drink bottled water, or disinfect water before drinking. If your private water supply is flooded you can take steps to disinfect the well. For instructions, go to [www.phd5.idaho.gov/](http://www.phd5.idaho.gov/) or call Environmental Health at South Central District Health, 208-737-5900 or 1-866-450-3594.
- Do not bathe or swim in floodwater. It may contain harmful organisms.

#### After the Flood

- Do not use the sewage system until water in the disposal field is lower than the water level around the house.
- If you suspect damage to your septic tank, have it professionally inspected and serviced. Signs of damage include settling or inability to accept water. Most septic tanks are not damaged by a flood since they are below ground and completely covered. However, sometimes septic tanks or pump chambers become filled with silt and debris, and must be professionally cleaned. If tile lines in the disposal field are filled with silt, a new system may have to be installed in new trenches. Because septic tanks may contain dangerous gases, only trained specialists should clean or repair them.
- Discard any items that are damaged by contaminated water and cannot be steam cleaned or adequately cleaned and disinfected.
- Do not pump water out of basements too quickly. Exterior water pressure could collapse the walls.
- If flood water backs up in a basement, clean the area and disinfect the floor with a chlorine solution of one-half cup of chlorine bleach to 1 gallon of water.

For more detailed information about flood recovery, the Centers for Disease Control provides essential tips to help you recover from a flood at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods>; “Reentering Your Flooded Home” at [www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/reenter.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/reenter.asp); and “Protect Yourself from Mold” at [www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/protect.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/protect.asp), or call CDC at 800-CDC-INFO (English and Spanish) or 888-232-6348 (TTY).

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