

Damaged on-site wastewater systems following a bushfire

On-site wastewater systems, such as septic tanks, secondary treatment systems, aerated wastewater treatment systems, and their land application systems can be easily damaged during a bushfire.



If your system is damaged and presents an immediate safety risk, action should be taken to make it safe.

Avoid driving or walking near a fire-affected system until it is assessed by a licensed plumber or service technician familiar with on-site wastewater systems.

Contact with effluent or untreated wastewater from damaged on-site wastewater systems can cause illness and should be avoided.

Plastic and fibreglass on-site wastewater systems, or systems made with plastic components, are more susceptible to damage than concrete tanks particularly if installed above ground. This includes shallow PVC pipes, plastic tanks and sumps, and plastic irrigation pipework. Pumps and other equipment with electrical components may also be damaged.

Damaged on-site wastewater systems should not be used until repaired or replaced.

Actions

If the on-site systems are damaged, arrange to have the system repaired as soon as possible to prevent sewage from backing up into the house

Reduce water use as much as possible until the system is inspected and repaired by:

- Reducing the frequency of toilet flushing for liquid waste
- Taking shorter showers
- Limiting laundry and dishwashing. If possible avoid using automatic clothes washers and dishwashers

If the power has not been restored, the septic tank can be used as a temporary holding tank and pumped out periodically, provided the tank is not damaged.

Once power is restored, ponding may occur near the wastewater system and these areas should be avoided. Contact a licenced plumber or authorised service technician to reassess the system.

Further information

Refer to the HealthyWA website:

healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/After-a-bushfire-hazards-on-your-property

Other factsheets include:

- Health hazards after a bushfire
- Asbestos hazards after a bushfire
- Ash from CCA treated timber after a bushfire
- Swimming pool contamination after a bushfire

- Rainwater tanks after a bushfire

To discuss further:

- Call the Environmental Health Directorate, Department of Health WA on (08) 9222 2000 or email ehinfo@health.wa.gov.au
- Contact your local government Environmental Health Officer

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

© Department of Health 2021

Copyright to this material is vested in the State of Western Australia unless otherwise indicated. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced or re-used for any purposes whatsoever without written permission of the State of Western Australia.

healthywa.wa.gov.au