

After The Storm: Information About Outdoor Clean-up

Flood Waters Contaminated with Fuel Oil and Sewage

Storms and heavy rains may contaminate residential properties with flood water containing sewage and home heating oil. This fact sheet will provide information about health risks, precautions to take to help keep you safe, and how to clean up your outdoor property safely.

General Precautions

- **If you see downed electrical lines in or near water, stay far away! Call the utility company, fire department, or police.**
- Assume that all flood water is contaminated – follow precautions below.
- Avoid contact with flood water whenever possible. Do not allow children or pets to play in flood water.
- Protect yourself if you need to come in contact with flood water. Cover up. Try not to let the water touch your skin. Wear rubber boots, rubber gloves (like dishwashing gloves), and eye protection. Make sure all cuts and scrapes are covered.
- To prevent breathing in hazardous particles, be sure to wear a dust mask if you will be disturbing dry soil or stirring up any dust.
- **Wash your hands thoroughly and often.** Wash all exposed skin that comes in contact with flood water or contaminated materials.
- Do not eat or smoke in damp or contaminated areas.

Exposure to Sewage

Testing of flood water may show high levels of fecal bacteria, indicating sewage contamination in the flood water. Even when the flood water recedes, there are still some potential health risks from this sewage contamination. These health risks will lessen with time. Most normal activities in the yard can be resumed 2 weeks after the flooding event.

Please refer to the fact sheet, *Post Flood: Key Facts About Infectious Disease* about disease prevention precautions you should take if your home was flooded with contaminated water.

http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/infectious_diseases/pdf_forms/post_flood_key_facts_about_id.pdf

Exposure To Home Heating Oil

How Might I Be Exposed?

Home heating oil can be released into the flood water if the oil tanks in basements leak. Most of the oil will stay inside of those basements, but some of the oily water can be pumped into yards by sump pumps, or leak outside and mix with the flood water.

Exposure can occur by touching items soaked with oily water, or by touching or walking through oily water or residue that might be left behind on soil or grass.

Health Concerns

Oily water or residue may cause a rash, itching, or both if it gets on your skin. The flood water dilutes the home heating oil releases, so any exposures should be small. If oily water or residue gets on your skin, wash promptly with soap and water. Keep cuts, scrapes, and wounds covered.

Should I Clean Up Oil In My Yard?

Diluted oily water can soak into the ground. Past experience has shown that it usually does not soak down further than a few inches. Additional clean up is usually not needed, because bacteria naturally found in the soil will “eat” the oil over time, breaking it down.

However, there may be some hot spots or areas where the oil concentrated. If you see any oily patches or puddles, black residue, or notice an oily smell in a certain area, you should report it to the Emergency Response and Spill Prevention Unit at the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). They will come out and evaluate it so that the oil can be handled properly.

Report

**Outdoor Oily Patches,
Puddles, or Odors**

to:

**CT DEEP 24/7
860-424-3338
or Toll Free at
1-866-DEP-SPIL
(1-866-337-7745)**

When Will My Yard Be Safe?

Both the sewage and oil will naturally degrade within a few weeks. After that, you can allow children and pets to play outside as they normally do. In the meantime, here are some extra precautions that you should take.

- **Throw out any crops that you planted this year—do not eat them.** You can eat plants from next year’s harvest.
- Stay away from obviously contaminated areas.
- Leave shoes outside or in the garage. This will prevent tracking contamination indoors.
- Wipe your pets’ feet before they come back indoors.
- Wear gloves if you do any gardening or planting.
- Wear a dust mask and eye protection during leaf raking or lawn mowing.
- **Wash your hands!**



For more information, call:

Connecticut Department of Public Health:

For Cleanup Questions:

Environmental & Occupational Health Assessment
Program: 860-509-7740

For questions related to infectious disease:

Epidemiology Program: 860-509-7994