



## PRESS RELEASE

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### For Immediate Release

Georgetown, CO

#### **FLOOD RECOVERY ACTIVITIES**

*-Clear Creek Environmental Health Issues Precautions and Recommendations-  
-One-call Hot Line Available -*

#### **2013 Fall Flood Hot Line 303 – 670-7507**

Clear Creek Environmental Health in cooperation with the Office of Emergency Management is providing a list of precautions and recommendations as well as a hot line number/voice mail box for public questions and concerns about water quality, sanitation and transportation access for flood recovery activities in the county. The voice mail box will be checked every 30 minutes.

Mitch Brown, Environmental Health Specialist, states that residents, first responders and volunteers should protect themselves from potential health hazards associated with flood waters. Precautions include disease/illness, wastewater, private wells, drinking water, and mold hazards.

#### **Disease/Illness**

Widespread outbreaks of infectious disease after floods **are not common** in the United States. However, people with three or more days of diarrhea, any bloody diarrhea, diarrhea plus a fever, or other health concerns, should contact their health care provider or Clear Creek County Environmental Health. In addition, it is best to keep immunizations up to date. Hepatitis A and Tetanus vaccine is available free while quantities last through the Public Health Nurse's office in the Community Resource Center in Idaho Springs. A small administrative fee of \$10.00 may apply. Please contact the Clear Creek County Public Health Nurses for more information on vaccine availability and nurse office hours: 303-303-670-7546. Immunizations also are available at the Safeway Pharmacy in Idaho Springs.

#### **Wastewater**

Onsite wastewater treatment (septic) systems can be damaged by floodwater or rendered temporarily inoperable due to saturated groundwater conditions. Water usage should be minimized as much as possible to avoid overloading the septic system. Signs your septic system is malfunctioning include sewer smells emit from your field, an oily sheen may be seen on the water, and water may be black or contain evidence of waste, such as feces and toilet paper.

Floodwaters have the potential to physically damage septic systems by exposing underground components such as the septic tank or leaching field. Tanks may float and be carried away; leaching beds may be eroded away by floodwaters. In either case, large numbers of bacteria may be released. Damage such as this should be immediately apparent after the floodwaters recede. If the property cannot be connected to a public sewer, these systems must be repaired or replaced. Clear Creek Public and Environmental Health does regulate the permitting and installation of septic systems. Even if the system has not been damaged by floodwaters it may still be impacted by high levels of groundwater that limit its ability to function properly. Sewage may not drain properly, causing it to back up into the house, which may then require interior cleaning and disinfection. At a minimum, owners should reduce water use as much as possible to avoid overloading their septic systems. This situation should improve once groundwater levels return to normal, but that may take some time. In the interim, alternate means of wastewater disposal, such as portable chemical toilets may be needed.

### **Private Wells**

If the floodwaters did not come in contact with the well casing, they may still cause an impact to the groundwater which the well taps. Excess amounts of groundwater may lead to increases in turbidity (cloudiness) and possibly a rise in bacteria. In addition, if the floodwaters rose around the well casing, they may cause problems with the electrical system that powers the pump. They may also have damaged the grouting around the casing, potentially allowing floodwaters to directly impact the groundwater. If floodwaters overtopped the casing, they may have compromised the sanitary seal on the wellhead and flowed down the casing itself. Sand and debris may damage the well pump and other internal components of the well.

Clear Creek Public and Environmental Health highly recommends testing the well to ensure safe drinking water. Water bottles for testing purposes are available for free at the County Annex located at 1111 Rose St, Georgetown. Samples may be dropped off at Jefferson County Public Health (1801 19<sup>th</sup> St., Golden) for a fee, or returned to the state Public Health office located at 8100 Lowry Blvd in Denver. There are no laboratories in Clear Creek County.

There is a potential for long term groundwater impacts which may require ongoing well disinfection or the use of bottled water. This will not be known until the wells have been repaired, disinfected, and tested. The Health Department does not regulate water wells or the quality of water they produce; well construction and permitting is handled by the Colorado Division of Water Resources (State Engineer's Office). The Department recommends that water quality meet the Colorado Primary Drinking Water standards, but this is a recommendation only.

### **Drinking water**

At this time, no boiling water is required; as all water treatment plants are operating properly. Flushing the lines for a few minutes may help reduce some of the turbidity or cloudiness in the water.

### **Mold**

Any surfaces that have come in contact with flood waters should be considered contaminated and properly disinfected with a bleach solution. A mixture of one-quarter cup of bleach to one gallon of water should be effective. If the item cannot be properly disinfected, it should be discarded. Most household cleaners should work if used properly. Please follow the manufacturer's directions. Do not mix chemicals and provide enough fresh air. Areas affected by flood waters should be properly disinfected and allowed to ventilate to prevent mold growth.