

## **After The Fire ... On-Site Sewage Facilities**

### **Site cleaning:**

An on-site sewage facility (OSSF) commonly referred to as a “septic system,” treats and disposes of wastewater on the same property where it is generated. Most of the area affected by recent wildfires primarily use OSSFs for wastewater treatment and disposal. Properties that will use heavy equipment to clear burned structures and vegetation should take care to prevent damage to a potentially undamaged OSSF. The weight of the equipment can break or compress vulnerable parts of the OSSF reducing or preventing their proper function which could result in a public health nuisance. Tanks, disposal areas, and connective piping should be located and marked off-limits to prevent unnecessary damage. Affected property owners should contact their local OSSF regulatory agency to obtain a site plan of their system. The site plan may not be to scale, so it is advisable to provide a liberal no-work zone around the system. Damaged OSSF components that must be repaired or replaced, such as tanks or drainfield pipes, may require the entire OSSF to be upgraded to current standards. (Contact your local OSSF authority for specific regulations).

### **Fire damage:**

Generally an OSSF is buried underground which should provide insulation from ground fire. Depending on the depth of the OSSF component and the intensity and duration of the fire, damages may occur. OSSFs that use pump tanks may need to replace pump and float wiring and alarms and control panels. OSSFs with an aerobic treatment unit (ATU) may also need to replace air pumps in addition to effluent pumps. ATU owners must ensure that the replacement parts are approved for their specific ATU. Most OSSF tanks are constructed of concrete and will be able to withstand heat from a fire. Some tanks, however, are constructed from plastic or fiberglass. All tanks should be checked to ensure that no damage occurred, but extra caution should be taken around non-concrete tanks to avoid collapsing lids. Components that may be a few inches below or at the ground surface and are likely to have suffered damage from the fire are: solid PVC piping, drip irrigation tubing, surface irrigation spray heads, and tank lids. Be sure to contact your local OSSF regulatory agency before performing any repairs or replacements. Many repairs or replacements require permits and inspections to ensure work is performed correctly to protect water quality and public health.

### **Rebuilding:**

OSSFs are approved to serve residences of a specific size and number of bedrooms. If the house will be rebuilt and connected to the existing OSSF, know what the maximum home size your OSSF is approved for to avoid violating your permit to operate the system. Commercial establishments are typically approved based on maximum gallons per day of wastewater. For details on a specific OSSF, contact your local OSSF regulatory agency.

Prior to the home being occupied, it is advised to test the OSSF with water for two or three days to verify it is working properly. A typical two bedroom home uses approximately 180 gallons per day, and a three bedroom uses approximately 240 gallons per day. It is recommended to use two or three dosing periods throughout the day to add the total daily volume.

### **Local OSSF Regulatory Agencies:**

LCRA: (512) 473-3216

Travis County: (512) 854-9383

Bastrop County: (512) 581-7176

Burnet County: (512) 756-5240