

Surfacing Sewage and Its Effects on Our Environment

There are many reasons, both environmental and aesthetic, why surfacing sewage is not permitted. If you see surfacing sewage contact DEQ's Complaints Hotline at 1-800-522-0206 and DEQ will initiate an investigation. When a violation is found, DEQ works with the responsible party to eliminate the surfacing sewage.

Q: What is considered sewage?

Sewage is defined as any wastewater that generally originates as human waste from certain activities including using toilet facilities, washing, bathing, preparing foods and laundry. This includes grey water from washing machines and sinks.

Q: What is considered surfacing sewage?

Examples of surfacing sewage violations include:

- Discharging any wastewater directly onto the ground.
- Bypassing any part of an on-site sewage treatment system so that sewage is discharged.
- Failure of an on-site sewage treatment system due to age, poor design, lack of maintenance or excessive water usage.
- Land application of sewage from an aerobic system when the sewage has not been properly treated and disinfected.
- Lagoon overflows or wastewater leaks through the dikes.
- Discharges of sewage to the environment from a service line connected to a public sewage treatment system.

Q: What are the public health effects of surfacing sewage?

Sewage can contain pathogens, or disease-causing organisms, such as bacteria, viruses and protozoa. Some of the common diseases that can be transmitted by sewage include:

- Bacterial diseases (e.g. E. coli, salmonellosis, shigellosis, typhoid, cholera and bacterial dysentery),
- Viral diseases (e.g. polio and hepatitis),
- Protozoal diseases (e.g. amoebic dysentery, cryptosporidiosis and giardiasis).

Q: How does surfacing sewage affect the environment?

If untreated or improperly treated sewage gets into streams or ponds, the organic material can deplete the oxygen, which can cause algae blooms and kill fish and other aquatic life.



Q: What should you do if you have surfacing sewage on your property?

Take immediate steps to prevent people and animals from coming into contact with the sewage. Once those immediate steps are taken, you should:

- Take action to prevent the sewage from leaving your property until a permanent fix can be made.
- Contact a plumber or an installer to either repair or replace your onsite septic system or sewer line.
- Contact your local DEQ representative if you need assistance.