

# LAND & WATER

## Surfacing Sewage & its effects on our environment

The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) investigates all complaints alleging surfacing sewage. When a violation is found, the DEQ takes action to cause the surfacing sewage to cease. In all instances, surfacing sewage is a violation. There are many reasons, both environmental and aesthetic, why surfacing sewage is not permitted.

### 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 washing laundry. This includes grey water from washing machines and sinks.

### What is considered surfacing sewage?

Surfacing sewage is sewage that has not been properly treated and is either discharged on or allowed to come to the surface of the ground. Examples of surfacing sewage violations include:

- Discharging any wastewater directly onto the ground because there is no on-site sewage disposal system.
- Bypassing an on-site sewage disposal system and discharging any wastewater directly onto the ground.
- When a subsurface on-site sewage disposal system fails due to age, poor design, lack of maintenance or excessive water usage and sewage comes to the surface of the ground.
- When an aerobic system land applies sewage that has not been properly treated and disinfected.
- When a lagoon overflows or wastewater leaks through the dikes.
- When a constructed wetland overflows.

### 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. coli poisoning, salmonellosis, shigellosis, typhoid, cholera, and bacterial dysentery); viral diseases (polio and hepatitis); and protozoal diseases (amoebic dysentery, cryptosporidiosis, and giardiasis).

### 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 kill fish and other aquatic life.

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

If you discover surfacing sewage on your property, you should:

- Take immediate steps to prevent people and animals from coming into contact with the sewage.
- Take action to prevent the sewage from leaving your property until a permanent fix can be made.
- Contact an installer to either repair your existing system or install a new system.
- Contact your local DEQ representative if you need assistance.

