



Winter Preparedness Checklist: Before the Storms

Santa Cruz County Environmental Health, the RCD and the NRCS recommend that you take these steps to protect your property and minimize environmental impacts before and during winter storms.



Septic Preparation:

- ◆ Be sure that drainage is diverted away from your septic tank and leachfield area. Although infiltration of stormwater is a good idea, it is best to not add more water to the leachfield area.
- ◆ Consider installing riser pipes in the leachfield if you don't already have them. These pipes extend down in to the soil in or adjacent to the leachfield and allow monitoring the water level in the leachfield. If you don't know where your leachfield is, check the records at the County Environmental Health Dept.
- ◆ If you have a pump up system, be sure rain or stormwater can't get into the pump chamber.
- ◆ If you have graywater irrigation, divert graywater to septic or sewer systems during rains.



Drainage Preparation for Roads and Around Homes

- ◆ Clear gutters and down spouts of debris. Clear ditches, culverts and culvert openings. If you have livestock, cover manure piles and ensure that gutters and ditches that convey water around the stables and paddocks are clear of debris.
- ◆ Protect culvert and drain outlets from erosion by providing velocity dissipation, which can consist of rock or other prepared outlets. Where feasible, use berms and perforated pipes to spread water and promote infiltration.
- ◆ Seek professional assistance to ensure proper grading and surfacing of roads.
- ◆ Install simple trash racks upstream of culvert openings to prevent plugging. For small culverts, rebar or pipes driven into the ground spaced slightly less than the culvert width and one culvert width upstream of the culvert opening can be effective. Do not place screens or other devices directly on the culvert inlet. They accumulate debris and prevent water from going through the culvert.



Slope and Streambank Preparation

- ◆ For slopes, protect existing plant cover. On bare or disturbed slopes, install erosion control measures such as mulch or plantings to protect soil from impact of rain and runoff.
- ◆ For streambanks, existing vegetation is the best protection against bank erosion. Do not dump plant debris on streambanks; this kills natural vegetation that stabilizes the bank.
- ◆ Stream wood should be left in place unless it is causing flooding or erosion that threatens life or property. Stream wood provides important benefits to streams including creating habitat, stabilizing channels and promoting groundwater recharge. If you're concerned about stream wood, contact the County (477-3999) for evaluation and assistance.
- ◆ Protect against rock slides. If there is a threat of large rocks releasing from slopes on your property or adjacent properties, seek professional assistance.



Well Preparation

- ◆ Ensure that the well head area is clean, clear and sealed. Remove dirt and leaf litter from the well pad and around the well head. Dig ditches or make berms to keep runoff and sediment away from the well pad. Seal any openings in the well head and around pipes and wires with a waterproof flexible, removable sealing compound.



Winter Maintenance Checklist: Throughout the Season

Santa Cruz County Environmental Health, the RCD and the NRCS recommend that you take these steps to protect your property and minimize environmental impacts before and during winter storms.



Drainage Maintenance for Roads and Around Homes

- ◆ Check gutters and down spouts for leaf accumulation between storms. Have ladders accessible in case gutters get plugged during storms.
- ◆ Check culverts and drainage infrastructure during storm events to ensure proper water flow. Timely clearing of a debris blockage can prevent expensive damage.



Slope and Streambank Maintenance

- ◆ Do not disturb soil and slopes during the rainy season. Slopes and soil are more susceptible to instability and erosion when vegetation is removed or disturbed, and when soil becomes saturated.
- ◆ Monitor and maintain existing and planned runoff-, erosion-, and sediment-control measures (including vegetative cover) before and throughout the rainy season. Correct deficiencies as soon as possible. Leaf litter may be a serious problem for roof, driveway, and landscape drainage systems.
- ◆ Be very careful using emergency or temporary practices such as sand bags, brush and slash, plastic sheeting, and hand-dug drainage ditches. Do not install without professional guidance. Covering slopes with plastic sheeting or dumping brush into gullies or other eroded areas is almost always the wrong thing to do. An improperly designed and placed emergency action can be worse than doing nothing. In fact, emergency measures may cause new hazards or problems, and provide a false sense of security.
- ◆ Divert runoff if all else fails. Divert with extreme caution. It may be helpful to re-route runoff and drainage away from unstable slopes, eroded areas, unprotected soil, etc.



Septic Maintenance:

- ◆ Monitor the level in riser pipes. If it is close to the surface, cut back on water use. If you have a second leachfield that is not as wet, switch to that leachfield. Take laundry to a laundromat.
- ◆ Monitor the leachfield area for saturation or surfacing of untreated effluent. If that occurs, have your septic tank pumped and cut back on indoor water use until things dry out.
- ◆ If you have ongoing problems, it may be time to upgrade your system under permit to better function during wet winter conditions
- ◆ If you are considering buying a house with a septic system, be sure to check the records at the consult with County Environmental Health staff. A system that looks great in the summer may have real problems in the winter.



Well Maintenance

- ◆ Inspect the wellhead periodically during the winter to ensure the well head is free of debris and not subject to runoff.

Below are some resources for more information and technical assistance:

Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County: www.rcdsantacruz.org, (831) 464-2950

Natural Resources Conservation Service, (831) 475-1967

County of Santa Cruz El Niño Guide for Residents: www.santacruzcounty.us/elnino