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# *ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN*

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## **SEWAGE DISPOSAL IN AN EMERGENCY**

### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN?**

In a large magnitude earthquake, sewer lines will probably be damaged and become inoperable. Sewage may back up and broken water lines may become contaminated by sewage overflow.

### **WHAT SHOULD I DO?**

If a sewer line blockage is suspected or obvious, discontinue using water as well as the discharge of wastewater to the house or building drains and do not flush toilets. Avoid contact with any overflowing wastewater or sewage. Divert wastewater or sewage by ditch, sandbags, or temporary pipeline into a functioning sewer manhole, or contain by sandbags and berm. Avoid diverting wastewater or sewage into areas of habitation or domestic water supplies.

### **WHAT CAN I USE?**

1. Portable camp toilets, recreational vehicle toilets, porta-potties, etc.
2. Large extra-strength trash bags (double bagged) may be placed in watertight plastic or metal containers with tight-fitting lids, or used as liners in toilets. Household disinfectant can be used for odor control. Final disposal can be by burying or sanitary sewer when notified by public officials.
3. When other methods are not available, a dug latrine or trench, 2 to 3 feet in depth, can be used to bury human waste. Spread a thin layer of powdered lime and a layer of earth each time it is used.

Sources: County of San Diego, Department of Environmental Health  
County of Santa Clara, Environmental Health Services