



Groundwater Flooding

Groundwater is a crucial fresh water resource that supplies springs, wells, and base flow to streams. When groundwater is very close to the surface, it can also cause chronic problems for those who experience basement flooding and compromised septic systems. Groundwater is stored and flows within the pore spaces of soil and rocks. It is present in all areas, even those that are not underlain by a major aquifer. Just because you don't see the groundwater under your property doesn't mean that it can't affect you.

Most building codes do not require that basements be positioned above the level of the seasonal high water table (top of the saturated strata). Why not? Because building officials typically do not know how deep the water table is at your site. The height of the water table may be so highly localized that your basement serves as an indoor swimming pool, while your neighbors' basements remain dry. In addition, the water table changes with time. The leach test conducted prior to installation of your septic system may not have detected the potential for groundwater inundation during other seasons or wetter years.

- Before you buy: Learn everything you can about groundwater levels and drainage patterns before you purchase a piece of property. If the current owners aren't using the basement, find out why? Although you can't see the depth of the water table, neighbors and municipal officials may have information that can enable you to anticipate or avoid expensive problems.
- Before you build: Investigate the groundwater characteristics of a site before installing a basement, pool, or septic system. If you are close to a river, stream, lake, or wetland, it is more likely that the water table will be close to the surface. Talk to neighbors and the local code enforcement officer. They may be able to give you valuable information about the water under your property.
- Responsibility: There are **no good solutions** to the basement flooding problems that result from groundwater inundation. If these problems are chronic, the cost of running a sump pump can be high. No government assistance is available to help you cope with groundwater flooding problems. Flood insurance only covers flood damage if the water enters your building from the surface. Whether your problems are chronic or occasional, your groundwater problems are **your responsibility**.
- Technical Assistance: Contact the municipal Code Enforcement Officer and/or County Soil and Water Conservation District for information about known high water table conditions. The County and State Departments of Health can assist with septic system design.