



Orange
County
Answers

FACT Sheet

Provided as a Community Service of Orange County Public Works Department • 4200 S. John Young Parkway • Orlando, Florida 32839

Why Do We Have Sinkholes In Central Florida?

Sinkholes, sometimes referred to as “sinks”, are widely distributed in the northern and central counties of Florida. Sinkholes form when groundwater dissolves the underlying limestone bedrock. The land usually stays intact for a while until the underground spaces just get too big. If there is not enough support for the land above the spaces, then a sudden collapse of the land surface can occur becoming a sinkhole.

In some cases, depressions are not sinkholes. They may be a result of water mains leaking, storm pipes that have separated, or broken irrigation systems. Some events that can contribute to the collapse are large fluctuations in the water table, drilling a well into the cavity, pumping large volumes of water near the cavity, constructing buildings above the cavity, diverting surface water drainage to the area where a cavity exists, or just the sheer weight of the material combined with the weakening of the supporting clay overtime.

What happens if a sinkhole develops on my property?

If a sinkhole develops on your property, you should notify your insurance company for direction. Orange County will perform an investigation as to the possible cause after your insurance company is contacted. If it is considered a threat to the public infrastructure, we will take steps to correct the situation. If we deem it is only a threat to private property, we can advise you as to actions that you may want to consider.

The Orange County Roads & Drainage Division has taken the lead in sinkhole investigations for unincorporated Orange County. Orange County has, from time to time, experienced sinkhole development especially during dry periods.

The Public Works Department receives a number of inquiries requesting verification of sinkholes. Because sinkholes can affect right-of-way infrastructure facilities, the Roads & Drainage Division is available to assist with sinkhole investigations.

Sinkhole Verification Process

The following process has been developed to verify sinkhole development within unincorporated Orange County.

Inquiries will be taken at (407) 836-7874 during normal business hours, 7:00 am to 5:00 pm daily, Monday through Friday. After normal business hours, the Sheriff's Office can be contacted at 407-836-4357.



Upon notification of potential sinkhole development, a Roads and Drainage staff member will visit the site to determine if the depression is a sinkhole. This includes both County owned or privately owned land.

Should a sinkhole develop on private land, the parcel owner will be responsible to take corrective action. It is recommended that such owners contact their insurance provider for direction and remedial action. If you discover a sinkhole on your property, the County advises taking the following action:

- Make sure it is fenced, roped, or taped very clearly. Usually, the property owner will be liable if someone is hurt in the sinkhole. Keep children away.
- Check carefully for signs of the sinkhole enlarging, especially toward buildings, septic tanks, drain fields, and wells. This can be done with a thin hard metal rod that can be pushed into the soil. Areas near the sinkhole will offer less resistance to the rod than the unaffected soil.
- Do not throw any type of waste into the sinkhole.
- Do not use the sinkhole as a drainage system.

If the sinkhole appears to be on County-owned areas, further investigations will be initiated by the Roads and Drainage Division. A certified soils engineer will assist with the investigation. If the sinkhole is within County right-of-way, County forces will proceed to take corrective measures based on field investigation and recommendations provided by the soils engineer.

Interim measures prior to the completion of the soils reports to protect County right-of-way and facilities may be implemented on a case-by-case basis. For County property, the Roads and Drainage Division of Public Works will coordinate securing the area to ensure the safety of citizens. 🐾