

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOUR SEPTIC TANK SYSTEM

Septic systems are individual on-site wastewater treatment systems that use bacteria and the soil to treat our wastewater. There are many variations to the system design but all have in common the following:

- A septic system consists of a septic tank, a distribution box and a drain field, all connected by pipes.
- The septic tank begins to treat your house-hold wastewater by temporarily holding it in the *first compartment* of the tank. Here heavy solids and lighter scum are allowed to separate from the wastewater. This is called the primary treatment. The solids stored in the tank are decomposed by bacteria. That which is not broken down, along with grease and other floating scum, must be removed periodically by a professional septic pumper.
- In the *second compartment* of the septic tank more solids settle out, allowing the relatively clear wastewater to leave the tank and flow into a distribution box, which separates the water flow into a network of drain field trenches. Drainage holes in the trench pipes allow the water to filter through the surrounding gravel and ultimately seeping slowly into the surrounding soil. Bacteria and other microorganisms in the soil further treat and purify the liquid, this is called secondary treatment. A properly functioning septic system does not pollute the groundwater and should function for many years.

COMMON QUESTIONS ASKED ABOUT SEPTIC SYSTEMS

Is the liquid coming from the septic tank “safe?”

No. Any way you look at it, septic tank effluent is sewage with some solids removed. It is still capable of spreading disease, breeding mosquitoes, causing odors and a nuisance.

Will it harm the septic tank to use disinfectants and bleaches for laundry and dishwashing?

No. The amounts of such products normally used should not harm the septic tank operation.

Should I use a starter, cleaner or other treatment aids in my septic tank?

No. It is not necessary to add yeast, raw meat, enzymes or other chemicals to start bacterial action in the tank. While starters or treatment aids are offered for sale, none are approved by this agency.

How often should I have the septic tank pumped?

It should be opened and inspected every three years or so, to see whether pumping is necessary. Most tanks will require pumping between three to five years. By periodic pumping of your tank, you will reduce the amount of solids and grease entering the drain field and extend its life and the need for expensive repairs.

Should kitchen sink and laundry waste go into a separate tank?

No. All wastewater from the home should be plumbed into a single large septic tank.

How can I reduce the amount of wastewater that goes into the drain field?

Considering the waste coming from your plumbing is over 95% water, it is wise to reduce *that* portion of the waste flow. *How –*

- Repair leaky fixtures (faucets, toilets, etc.).
- Wash clothes/dishes only when you have a full load.
- Take short showers instead of baths.
- Use water saving devices in your toilet tank or install a new low-flow toilet.
- Install low-flow showerheads.
- Don't use the toilet as a wastebasket, for spider disposal, etc.

How can I tell when my drain field is malfunctioning?

- When there are odors, persistent wet spots and/or lush growth of grass in the area of your field.
- Your plumbing drains become sluggish when used heavily or during wet weather.
- Problems continue even though the septic tank has been recently pumped out.

HELPFUL HINTS

Don't build patios, driveways, house additions, etc. over the tank or leach field. Verify location before starting projects.

Don't discharge drain gutters, patio drains, and foundation perimeter drains over leach field areas.

Don't plant trees which require and seek great amounts of water over the leach field.

Don't use commercial septic tank additives. None have been proven beneficial to the septic system and some may hurt your system in the long run.

Don't use your toilet as a trash can by dumping non-degradables (candy wrappers, sanitary napkins, coffee grounds, etc) down you toilet or drains.

Do select licensed septic tank service people for pumping your tank. For repairing or additions to the system, use a license contractor. Both are listed in the yellow pages.

Do take leftover hazardous household chemicals to an approved County/City hazardous waste collection center for disposal. Don't poison your septic system and the groundwater by pouring harmful chemicals down the drain.

Do practice water conservation. Repair dripping faucets and leaking toilets, run washing machines and dishwashers only when full, avoid long showers, and use water saving features in faucets, showerheads and toilets.

Do keep a record of pumping, inspections, repairs and other maintenance.