

CARING FOR YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM

Dos and Don'ts of a septic system

- Learn the location of your septic tank, drain field and any water wells. Keep a sketch handy with your maintenance record for service visits. Obtain a copy of your septic permit and map inspection, if possible.
- Divert other sources of water, like **roof drains, house footing drains, and sump pumps**, away from the septic system. A soggy drainfield won't absorb and neutralize liquid waste. Plan landscaping, roof gutters and foundation drains so that excess water is diverted away from the septic drainfield.
- Take leftover hazardous household chemicals to your approved hazardous waste collection center for disposal. Use bleach disinfectants, and toilet bowl cleaners sparingly and in accordance with product labels.

DO NOT Flush Or Wash Down The Drain!		
• coffee grounds	• bones	• dental floss
• fat or grease	• kitty litter	• disposable diapers
• paper products	• paper towels	• cigarette butts
• condoms	• sanitary napkins	• tampons
or hazardous chemicals, such as:		
• paints	• varnishes	• paint thinners
• pesticides	• kerosene	• photographic solutions
• oils	• gasoline	• pesticides

Don't Overload the Septic Tank and Drainfield

- Check faucets for leaks; make repairs if necessary.
- Use aerators on faucets and flow reducer nozzles on showers to help lower water consumption.
- Reduce water levels for small loads of laundry.
- Wait until the dishwasher is full to run it.
- Use a displacer to reduce the amount of water needed to flush the toilet.
- Check toilets for leaks at least once a year by putting a few drops of food coloring into the tank. Without flushing, see if the coloring enters the bowl. This indicates a leak.

Use Garbage Disposals Wisely

- A garbage disposal can double the amount of solids added to a septic tank.
- Choose a top-of-the-line disposal that grinds food into tiny particles that are easier for a system to digest.

Water Softeners

- These can put several hundred gallons of water down the drain every week that is **NOT** contaminated and does not need to go through the treatment process. If your filtration system is older, up-grade your softener with a newer efficient model that uses less water. You could also install a mini-septic system or dry well dedicated for your softener.
- If your well water is high in iron content, back flushing the iron or other metals into your septic system can cause damage to the leach bed or drain field.

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Keep Trees (roots) Away from the Septic System

- Discourage root damage by keeping trees at least 10 - 30 meters away from the septic system.
- Trees with very aggressive roots, such as willows, should be even farther away from the system.

Protect the System from Damage

- Do not drive over the drainfield, or plan any building additions, pools, driveways, or other construction work over the septic system

Septic Tank Aids

- These products are sold in many forms, but they do not reduce the need to regularly remove solids from the septic tank by pumping. Many of these products include bacteria, yeasts, enzymes, mild acids, mild bases, or biodegradable organic solvents that are not harmful to the septic system, but some will damage the tank or drain field or contaminate the groundwater.

Perform Regular Maintenance

- Solids must eventually be **pumped from the tank**. Many experts advise a family of four with a 1,000 gallon septic tank to have the tank pumped after 3-5 years of full time use. Other experts say you can go much longer between pumping operations.
- **Don't ever go down into a septic tank**. Toxic gases can kill humans in minutes, even when just looking in the lid opening.
- Install a watertight concrete riser over the septic tank to simplify access.
- Maintain adequate vegetative cover over the drainfield.

Tank Size (gallons)	People Using the System				
	1	2	4	6	8
900	11	5	2	1	<1
1,000	12	6	3	2	1
1,250	16	8	3	2	1
1,500	19	9	4	3	2

Source: Adapted from "Estimated Septic Tank Pumping Frequency," by Karen Mancl, Journal of Environmental Engineering. Volume 110.

Signs that your system is failing

- Sewage backup in drains or toilets.
- Slow flushing toilets, sinks or drains.
- Visible liquid on the surface of the ground near the septic system. It may or may not have an odor associated with it.
- Lush green grass over the drain field, even during dry weather. Often, this indicates that an excessive amount of liquid from the system is moving up through the soil, instead of downward, as it should.
- Build-up of aquatic weeds or algae in lakes or ponds adjacent to your home. This may indicate that nutrient-rich septic system waste is leaching into the surface water.
- Unpleasant odors around your house.