

## **Caring for your septic system and Tips**

### **How can you avoid a septic system nightmare?**

- **don't dump chemicals down your drains**
- **don't let vehicles drive over your drain field (they can crush the drainpipes)**
- **don't pour grease and oils into the system**
- **the less water you use, the better**
- **stagger heavy water usage, i.e. showers, clothes washing, bathing.**
- **don't flush dyed or heavy toilet tissue**
- **don't flush feminine hygiene products**
- **avoid washing quantities of chlorine bleach into the systems**
- **develop grass over the field to help stabilize the soil**
- **do not grow trees too near the field, particularly willows (their roots can damage the drain field)**

### **What About Additives**

Beware of septic-additive products that claim to eliminate the need for septic tank pump-outs. The bacteria that help break down organic matter in your septic tank are naturally occurring; you should not need to add more. Studies consistently show most septic-additive products have little effect on septic systems, according to Michael Hoover at the Department of Soil Science, North Carolina State University. Although septic additives do contain biologically-based materials like bacteria, enzymes and yeast, they also can contain harmful solvents. Some additives, which claim to degrease your system, may damage your drain field, contaminate your soil and groundwater, and in some states, be illegal.

## **How maintain your system tips**

### **Inspect and Pump Frequently**

- You should have your septic system inspected at least every 3 years or as your local county or city requires by a professional and your tank pumped as recommended by the inspector (generally every 3 to 5 years). Systems with electrical float switches, pumps, or mechanical components need to be inspected more often.
- Four major factors influence the frequency of pumping: the number of people in your household, the amount of wastewater generated (based on the number of people in the household and the amount of water used), the volume of solids in the wastewater (for example, using a garbage disposal increases the amount of solids), and septic tank size.

### **Use Water Efficiently**

- Average indoor water use in the typical single-family home is almost 70 gallons per person per day. Leaky toilets can waste as much as 200 gallons each day. The more water a household conserves, the less water enters the septic system. Efficient water use can improve the operation of the septic system and reduce the risk of failure.

- A small drip from a faucet adds many gallons of unnecessary water to your system every day. To see how much a leak adds to your water usage, place a cup under the drip for 10 minutes. Multiply the amount of water in the cup by 144 (the number of minutes in 24 hours, divided by 10). This is the total amount of clean water traveling to your septic system each day from that little leak.
- Doing all the household laundry in one day might seem like a time-saver, but it could be harmful to your septic system. Doing load after load does not allow your septic tank time to adequately treat wastes. You could be flooding your drainfield without allowing sufficient recovery time. Try to spread water usage throughout the week.

### **What not to put in the system**

- Does someone in your house use the utility sink to clean out paint rollers or flush toxic cleaners? Oil-based paints, solvents, and large volumes of toxic cleaners should not enter your septic system. Even latex paint cleanup waste should be minimized. Squeeze all excess paint and stain from brushes and rollers on several layers of newspaper before rinsing. Leftover paints and wood stains should be taken to your local household hazardous waste collection center. Remember that your septic system contains a living collection of organisms that digest and treat waste.
- Eliminating the use of a garbage disposal can reduce the amount of grease and solids entering the septic tank and possibly clogging the drain field. A garbage disposal grinds up kitchen scraps, suspends them in water, and sends the mixture to the septic tank. Once in the septic tank, some of the materials are broken down by bacterial action, but most of the grindings have to be pumped out of the tank. Using a garbage disposal frequently can significantly increase the accumulation of sludge and scum in your septic tank, resulting in the need for more frequent pumping.

### **Septic Dos and Don'ts**

#### **DOs**

- Check with the local regulatory agency or inspector/pumper if you have a garbage disposal unit to make sure that your septic system can handle this additional waste.
- Check with your local health department before using additives. Commercial septic tank additives do not eliminate the need for periodic pumping and can be harmful to the system.
- Use water efficiently to avoid overloading the septic system. Be sure to repair leaky faucets or toilets. Use high-efficiency fixtures.
- Use commercial bathroom cleaners and laundry detergents in moderation. Many people prefer to clean their toilets, sinks, showers, and tubs with a mild detergent or baking soda.
- Check with your local regulatory agency or inspector/pumper before allowing water softener backwash to enter your septic tank.
- Keep records of repairs, pumping's, inspections, permits issued, and other system maintenance activities.
- Learn the location of your septic system. Keep a sketch of it with your maintenance record for service visits.
- Have your septic system inspected at least every 3 years and pumped periodically (generally every 3 to 5 years) by a licensed inspector/contractor.
- Plant only grass over and near your septic system. Roots from nearby trees or shrubs might clog and damage the drain field.

## **Don'ts**

- Your septic system is not a trash can. Don't put dental floss, feminine hygiene products, condoms, diapers, cotton swabs, cigarette butts, coffee grounds, cat litter, paper towels, latex paint, pesticides, or other hazardous chemicals into your system.
- Don't use caustic drain openers for a clogged drain. Instead, use boiling water or a drain snake to open clogs.
- Don't drive or park vehicles on any part of your septic system. Doing so can compact the soil in your drain field or damage the pipes, tank, or other septic system components.