

Tips for using your septic system

Even a properly designed and installed septic system cannot treat wastewater if the tank is not used and maintained properly. Here are a few tips for installing and using your septic system:

- For future maintenance and to avoid deep root planting and other damaging activities in the drainfield area, make an accurate diagram showing the location of your tank, drainfield and replacement area.
- Keep a record of pumping, inspection, and other maintenance. Include name, address and phone numbers for installers and pumpers.
- To simplify tank access for inspection and maintenance, install a watertight concrete riser over the septic tank.
- The area over the drainfield should be left undisturbed, with only a mowed grass cover. Roots from nearby trees or shrubs may clog and damage your drain lines.
- Keep automobiles and heavy equipment off the drainfield.
- Do not plan any building additions, pools, driveways, or other construction work near the septic tank, drainfield or the replacement drainfield area.
- Do not put too much water into the septic system.

Water overload occurs when the drainfield is flooded with more water than it can effectively absorb, reducing the ability of the system to drain wastes and filter sewage before it reaches groundwater. It also increases the risk that effluent will pool on the ground surface and run off into surface water or down nearby water well casings. Typical indoor water use is about 50 gallons per day for each person in the family. Water-saving devices such as low-flow shower heads, faucet aerators, toilet dams or low-flow toilets can greatly reduce water flow into the system. Strategies such as taking short showers, spreading out laundry loads over the week and never allowing rain water from downspouts to enter the septic system will also help.

- Do not flush non-biodegradable materials such as plastics, disposable diapers, sanitary napkins and applicators; they rapidly fill up the tank and will clog the system.
- Restrict the use of your kitchen garbage disposal; it increases the amount of solids in the tank, making them slower to decompose.
- Do not pour grease or cooking oils down the sink drain because they solidify and clog the soil absorption field.
- Don't allow paints, motor oil, pesticides, fertilizers or disinfectants to get into your septic system. They can pass directly through the septic system and contaminate groundwater. These chemicals can also kill the microorganisms that decompose wastes and can damage the soil in the drainfield.
- Do not use caustic drain openers for a clogged drain. Instead use boiling water or a drain snake to free up clogs. Clean your toilet, sinks, shower and tubs with a mild detergent or baking soda rather than the stronger and potentially system-damaging commercial bathroom cleansers.
- If a water softener is used in the home, the salt recharge solution should not be allowed to enter the system if the predominant soils in the drainfield are very fine textured and drainage is very slow. In these situations, sodium in the softener recharge solution may damage soil structure in the drainfield and plug the system. If you have a water softener, the size of the absorption field must be increased to accommodate the additional flow.