

THE CARE & FEEDING OF A SEPTIC SYSTEM

*A good rule of thumb (except for human wastes): **If you haven't, wouldn't or couldn't eat it – Don't flush it into the septic tank!***

Septic System Use – Things to Do

- Have your septic tank serviced regularly. When used daily, the septic tank should be inspected at least every three years and pumped when the total depth of sludge and scum exceeds one-third of the liquid depth of the tank. If the tank is not cleaned periodically, the solids are carried into the leach system. The result is leach system clogging and failure. Pumping your septic tank is significantly less expensive than replacing your leachfield. Insist that the pumping service clean all compartments of the septic tank (typically two compartments). There should be inspection ports with risers over each compartment. It is important that the inlet and outlet tees are in good condition and that the baffle wall is fully functional. Newer systems may have effluent filters. If a filter does not exist, one should be installed.
- Spread laundry use over the week rather than many loads on one day. Dedicating an entire day to doing laundry will put a severe strain on your septic system. Only wash full loads. The average load of laundry uses about 45 gallons of water. One load per day rather than 7 loads on Saturday makes a big difference to your septic system. Front loading washers use less water than top loaders.
- Use liquid laundry detergent. Powdered laundry detergents use clay as a 'carrier'. This clay can hasten the buildup of solids in the septic tank and potentially plug the disposal area (leach system).
- Minimize the amount of household cleaners (bleach, harsh cleansers) and similar toxic substances. Detergents, kitchen waste, laundry waste and household chemicals in normal amounts do not affect the proper operation of household sewage treatment systems. However, excessive quantities can be harmful. Your septic system relies on biological activity to break down wastes. Disinfectants by design impede healthy biological activity.
- Make a permanent record of where the key parts of your septic system are located for future maintenance (i.e., the septic tank, any distribution component, the leach system, inspection risers, etc.).
- Keep the records of all septic pumping service and septic system maintenance.
- Use water-conserving devices wherever possible. Low flush toilets and shower heads are commonly available and should be installed. [For Example; showerheads (2.5 gallons/minute), toilets (1.6 gallons), dishwashers (5.3 gallons, and washing machines (14 gallons)] Installing conservation fixtures can reduce the amount of water entering the septic system by 20,000 gallons per year!
- Check effluent filters and any pumps or other mechanical parts of your system regularly. An annual inspection service of all mechanical components is recommended.
- Remove or prevent trees with large root systems growing near the septic tank and leach system and don't plant trees or large vegetation within 20 feet of your septic system. Tree roots clog piping and may clog the leach system.

- Check surface drains at least annually to ensure that stormwater runoff does not pond or flow over your septic system. All roof and other drainage piping should be extended beyond or away from your septic system.
- Run water regularly (at least one gallon) in seldom used drains such as sinks, tubs, showers, etc. to avoid noxious gases from building up and causing odors inside.
- Keep swimming pools, hot tubs, spas, and water features away from your septic system and do not drain water from them into or onto your septic system.

Septic System Use – Things to Prevent

- Avoid excessive use of garbage disposal systems in your kitchen. Food grinders increase the accumulation of solids in the septic tank and leach system. Their disadvantages far outweigh the convenience they provide and are not recommended for households with their own sewage treatment systems. Septic tank size should be increased, if you use a food grinder, and the septic tank should be pumped more frequently (possibly annually); better yet, compost your kitchen wastes. Food grinders lead to buildup of grease especially from meat and bones.
- A few things (not a complete list) that should never go into the septic tank:
 - cigarette butts
 - disposable diapers
 - sanitary napkins & tampons (all such products)
 - any “disposable” wipe products, except toilet tissue
 - pop-off toilet wand scrubbers
 - trash/garbage
 - condoms
 - hair
 - bandages
 - rags, strings & other cloth products
 - coffee grounds
 - paper towels
 - anti-bacterial soaps – Use biodegradable soaps only!
 - latex, plastic, or metallic objects
 - dead fish or small animals
- Don’t use or discharge chlorine and other household chemicals in excess to your septic system – (1-part chlorine to 5-part of water is a good spray bacteria cleaner).
- Don’t allow water conditioning backwashes/discharge from water softeners, purifiers, sanitizers, air conditioners, or dehumidifiers into your septic system; This includes hot tubs, jacuzzi and swimming pool discharges.
- Eliminate all water from leaking faucets, fixtures, and toilets. Remember to dye test the toilet often to check for leaks into the septic system.

- Avoid dirt and inert products. Muddy clothes, fruits and vegetables should be dusted off before washing them.
- Don't dispose of chemicals from x-ray or photo equipment, even if diluted; they will re-condense in the disposal system and eventually pollute the underground environment.
- Don't use hair conditioners with heavy oils .
- Don't dispose of kitchen greases into the septic system.
- Don't dispose of any petroleum products into your septic system.
- Septic tank additives are not recommended. Additives are unnecessary to the proper operation of household septic systems and may cause the sludge and scum in the septic tank to be discharged into the leach system, resulting in premature failure. Some additives may pollute your groundwater. Those which advertise that they will remove solids from your tank usually do; the solids exit the tank and end up in the leach system. Normal human waste contains enough bacteria to support a healthy septic tank, and other microbes are already present in the leach system soil.

REMEMBER - YOUR SEPTIC TANK AND LEACH SYSTEM ARE BIOLOGICAL SYSTEMS.

YOU CAN KEEP THEM HEALTHY AND FUNCTIONING PROPERLY BY MINIMIZING CHEMICAL USE AND PREVENTING NON-DECOMPOSABLES FROM GOING INTO THE SEPTIC TANK.

REGULAR MAINTENANCE (INSPECTION AND SEPTIC TANK PUMPING) ARE NECESSARY.

BRAGGING THAT "I HAVE NEVER HAD TO PUMP MY SEPTIC TANK" WILL EVENTUALLY BITE YOU!

An additional note, if your septic system is in the Mt Hermon area or other areas of Santa Cruz County with sandy, fast percolating soils: ***If your leach system fails and must be replaced, you will be required to install an enhanced treatment system and it may cost more than that new car you have been dreaming about.***