

Home Septic System Education

Septic System Basics

A septic system uses natural processes to sanitize wastewater. It helps reduce health risks and water contamination. Proper design, installation, operation, and maintenance are critical.

A septic system must be properly and regularly maintained. This saves money, protects your family's health, and protects the environment.

- Septic tanks **MUST** be pumped periodically. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends every three to five years.
- The drainfield needs to be protected from overloading and compaction. If you have a discharge pipe, make sure the pipe is unobstructed so the treated wastewater may flow out to a nearby ditch or coulee.

Did You Know?

- Good vegetative cover is important for drainfield function and maintenance.
- Do not drive or park anything heavier than a lawnmower over any part of your septic system.
- Do not plant trees or shrubs over or near your system.
- Commercial starters, feeders, and other additives are **NOT** necessary and may interrupt the natural processes that make the system effective.
- Avoid putting hair, coffee grounds, dental floss, diapers, kitty litter, feminine hygiene products, cigarette butts, etc. in the system.
- **NEVER** put paint, varnishes, paint thinners, waste oils, or pesticides in the system

Money Matters

- The cost of regular maintenance is far less than the cost of system replacement (i.e., pumping cost can range from \$100 to \$400 vs. system replacement cost of \$2,000 to \$15,000 or more).
- A small effort on a regular basis can save homeowners from major cost and inconvenience.



Did You Know?

- An unusable septic system or one in poor condition can lower your property value.
- Improper maintenance is the most common cause of costly septic system repair or replacement.

Water Conservation and Pollution

- Practicing conservation and efficient water use ensures a properly functioning septic system.
- Average water use in a single-family home is around 70 gallons per person per day. (U.S. EPA)
- Too much water entering the tank/drainfield at once can cause inadequate treatment.
- If the wastewater is not treated properly, this can lead to contaminated water being discharged into nearby water bodies resulting in high concentrations of fecal coliform bacteria.



Did You Know?

- Leaky toilets can waste up to 200 gallons of water each day.
- Early morning and bedtime are peak water use times.
- Runoff from roofs, driveways, and roads onto the drainfield can overload the system.
- Failing home septic tanks can allow untreated human wastes to flow into drainage ditches and nearby waters. And sewage connections that are connected to stormwater drainage pipes can also allow human sewage into surface waters.



Please be aware and observant of your home septic system. Regular visual inspections of your system are a good maintenance practice. Be observant of wet spots, surfacing sewage, septic tank backups, slow draining fixtures, gurgling sounds in the plumbing, sewage odors in the house or yard, and any irregular discharge coming from the discharge pipe or drainfield. For more information or if you notice any of the above, please contact your local environmental quality office.

Information courtesy of: The Groundwater Foundation and the Lafayette Consolidated Government Environmental Quality Division (337) 291-8529.