

SEPTIC SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

Maintaining your septic system is good for your wallet, good for your health and good for the environment. Here are some things you can do to keep your system operating at peak performance.

- **Inspect your system at least once a year** by removing the septic tank lid, measuring the depth of accumulated sludge, checking concrete condition, alternating secondary treatment systems, cleaning effluent filters if supplied and performing other tasks as recommended by the manufacturer.
- **Plan to have your septic tank pumped every three to five years** to remove sludge and scum. A list of reputable septage haulers as well as other useful septic system information can be obtained from Allen County Public Health by logging onto AllenCountyPublicHealth.org, then hovering over Environmental Health and clicking on Household Sewage Treatment, or by calling 419-228-4457.
- **Beware of septic tank additives.** Their benefits are not proven; some may actually harm a system by allowing solids to move from the septic tank into the secondary treatment system.
- **Limit the use of garbage disposals.** Frequent use of garbage disposals significantly increases water usage and the accumulation of sludge and scum in septic tanks, resulting in the need for more frequent pumping.
- **If your system has a pump** or other electrical components, check them every month to be sure they are properly maintained and functioning.
- **Practice water conservation** to avoid over working your system and to extend its life.
- **Divert surface runoff water** away from your soil absorption system to avoid saturating the soil. Waste systems depend on well-drained areas.
- **Never construct anything over your system.** Structures and pavement can compact the soil and prevent it from properly absorbing, filtering and evaporating the effluent.
- **Don't park or drive vehicles or machinery over your system.** Heavy machinery and vehicles can compress or break underground pipes and compact the soil.
- **Don't plant trees and shrubs over your septic system.** Their roots can clog or break underground pipes and can make access to the system difficult for pumping, inspection and repair. Grass is the best vegetative cover.
- **Be careful about what you flush or drain into the system.** Do not put non-degradable products, household chemicals, grease, oil, cigarette butts, cat litter, medications, coffee grounds and other trash down the drain.

Following these simple guidelines will help protect your septic system, protect the environment and save you from expensive repair bills.



HOW SEPTIC SYSTEMS WORK

Many rural and suburban homeowners rely on on-site septic systems for their wastewater treatment. The most common septic system is the septic tank-soil absorption system. By understanding and properly managing your on-site system you will not only enhance your property but also prevent public health hazards and pollution of groundwater and nearby streams.

Toilets, sinks, bathtubs, showers, washing machines, dishwashers and floor drain discharges are required to be connected to the septic system for treatment. Often in older homes built before 1950, only toilets were tied into the septic tank with other grey water wastes traveling untreated to the nearest drainage ditch or stream through underground tile.

Septic systems have two key components: a primary septic settling tank and a secondary soil absorption or sand filtering system. The system provides wastewater treatment in two stages. First, the wastewater is discharged to a septic tank, a buried watertight tank in which household wastes settle to the bottom to be decomposed by bacteria into sludge. Lighter materials float to the top and form scum which is trapped in the tank by baffles.

During the second stage of treatment, the septic tank liquid (effluent) discharges to a soil absorption (leaching) system or to a subsurface sandfilter. In a soil absorption system, the effluent flows through a network of pipes and into the soil which acts as a filter, removing suspended solids, pollutants and bacteria. In a sandfilter, the septic tank effluent is treated by bacteria on the filter media (sand), with the treated wastewater being discharged off-lot.

The symptoms of a malfunctioning septic system include:

- A foul odor
- Wastewater backing up into household drains
- Bright green spongy grass on the drainfield, even during dry weather
- Pooling water around your septic system or in your basement

If you experience any of these issues, call a septic professional immediately.

If you have questions or need more information about managing your septic system, contact Allen County Public Health or the Allen Soil and Water Conservation District.

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