

# CARING FOR YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM

## SEPTIC SYSTEM DO LIST

- ◀ Do spread out laundry throughout the day and week
- ◀ Do repair any leaking toilets and faucets
- ◀ Do have your tank pumped every 2 to 3 years
- ◀ If you have an outlet filter, do have it hosed off when the tank is pumped.
- ◀ Do keep your septic tank lids accessible
- ◀ Do minimize the use of your garbage disposal
- ◀ Do keep rain and storm run off away from your drain field
- ◀ Do plant something with small roots over the drain field, such as grass
- ◀ If you have a pressurized system, do check the pump chamber, pump and floats every year and replace or repair any worn or broken parts

## SEPTIC SYSTEM DO NOT LIST

- ◆ Do NOT put grease down the drain
- ◆ Do NOT pave, drive, or build on the drainfield or reserve area
- ◆ Do NOT flush anything but toilet paper into your system
- ◆ Do NOT put coffee grounds, cigarette butts, plastics, paper towels, clay, or dental floss down the drains
- ◆ Do NOT plant trees on your drainfield
- ◆ Do NOT use additives – none are approved by the State
- ◆ Do NOT empty hot tubs or spas into septic system

## SIGNS OF SEPTIC SYSTEM FAILURE

- ◆ Water or damp soil in drainfield area
- ◆ Sewage backing up into residence
- ◆ Slow draining toilets, sinks or bathtubs
- ◆ Odors of sewage around septic tank

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## RESIDENTIAL EVALUATION CHECKLIST EXPLANATION

1. On-site sewage systems are designed for the assumed number of people in the home, using the number of bedrooms as an indicator. It is expected that there will be 1.2 people per bedroom. Additional people in the home can overload the system.
2. Laundry habits can have a great effect on a sewage system. Laundry loads should be spread out through the week and the day to allow the drainfield to dispose of the water from one load before introducing another surge of water.
3. The brand of detergent used is probably less important than the amount used. In general, liquid detergent is easier on a drainfield than powdered detergent. Using detergents with bleach added in every load can create sewage system problems.  
(See #4)
4. Everyone uses bleach from time to time. But it is important to remember that bleach is an antibacterial agent, and sewage systems need bacteria to operate.
5. Vegetable matter does not break down as readily as protein matter. When vegetable scraps are put through a garbage disposal unit they tend to either become suspended or accumulate in the bottom of the tank without being reduced in size. If you use a garbage disposal you should plan to have your tank pumped once a year.  
  
(If you do a good deal of home canning what seems like a small amount of material washed off the fruits/vegetables adds up quickly and has the same affect as a garbage disposal. If possible filter fruit and vegetable wash water as much as possible.)
6. Dishwashers normally use less water than washing dishes by hand. But this is only true if you wash only full dishwasher loads.

7. Drain cleaners and septic additives can be very hard on sewage systems. If a cleaner/additive is designed to reduce the amount of solids in the tank it is actually suspending the solids and sending them out into the drainfield. Suspended solids clog up the soils in the drainfield and seal it off. If a cleaner/additive is designed to clean out the drainfield (i.e., tree roots, etc.) it creates a hostile environment in the septic tank. Drain cleaners and additives should not be used at all.
8. Long term use of antibiotics and many prescriptions can have the same affect on a sewage system as large amounts of bleach. While there isn't much you can do to eliminate long term use of these medications when prescribed, you can be aware that you will have to have your septic tank pumped more often.
9. Living with an on-site sewage system presents different challenges than living with a sanitary sewer. You need to be more aware of how your use water and what products you use to help your sewage system work as well as possible.
10. In general septic tanks should be pumped every 2 to 5 years, depending on use. As noted above there are times when yearly pumping is recommended.
11. When sewage comes to the surface of the ground it becomes a public health concern. Not only are people exposed to the sewage, but kids, animals, and you can track the sewage into the home and deposit it on floors and carpets. It is then transferred to hands, clothes, food, etc.
12. When grease and oil are flushed into the sewage system they become part of the scum layer at the top of the sewage in the tank. Too thick of a scum layer increases the potential for the scum to become suspended and flow into the drainfield. Scum will bond with the soils and prevent effluent from dispersing into the soil.

**WAC 246-272A-0270 Operation, monitoring, and maintenance--Owner responsibilities. (Effective July 1, 2007)**

- (1) The OSS owner is responsible for operating, monitoring, and maintaining the OSS to minimize the risk of failure, and to accomplish this purpose, shall:
  - (a) Obtain approval from the local health officer before repairing, altering or expanding an OSS;
  - (b) Secure and renew contracts for periodic maintenance where required by the local health jurisdiction;
  - (c) Obtain and renew operation permits if required by the local health jurisdiction;
  - (d) Assure a complete evaluation of the system components and/or property to determine functionality, maintenance needs and compliance with regulations and any permits:
    - (i) At least once every three years for all systems consisting solely of a septic tank and gravity SSAS;
    - (ii) Annually for all other systems unless more frequent inspections are specified by the local health officer;
  - (e) Employ an approved pumper to remove the septage from the tank when the level of solids and scum indicates that removal is necessary;
  - (f) Provide maintenance and needed repairs to promptly return the system to a proper operating condition;
  - (g) Protect the OSS area and the reserve area from:
    - (i) Cover by structures or impervious material;
    - (ii) Surface drainage, and direct drains, such as footing or roof drains. The drainage must be directed away from the area where the OSS is located;
    - (iii) Soil compaction, for example by vehicular traffic or livestock; and
    - (iv) Damage by soil removal and grade alteration;
  - (h) Keep the flow of sewage to the OSS at or below the approved operating capacity and sewage quality;
  - (i) Operate and maintain systems as directed by the local health officer;
  - (j) Request assistance from the local health officer upon occurrence of a system failure or suspected system failure; and
  - (k) At the time of property transfer, provide to the buyer, maintenance records, if available, in addition to the completed seller disclosure statement in accordance with chapter 64.06 RCW for residential real property transfers.
- (2) Persons shall not:
  - (a) Use or introduce strong bases, acids or chlorinated organic solvents into an OSS for the purpose of system cleaning;
  - (b) Use a sewage system additive unless it is specifically approved by the department; or
  - (c) Use an OSS to dispose of waste components atypical of sewage from a residential source.