

TAKING CARE OF YOUR HOME SEWAGE DISPOSAL SYSTEM

Home owners are responsible for keeping their home sewage disposal systems in good working order. Lack of maintenance can result in system malfunction and costly repairs. The choice is simple, pay a little now for regular inspection and pumping... *or a lot later!*

AN ON-SITE SYSTEM

On-site sewage disposal systems treat and dispose of sewage. They have three major parts: a septic tank, a disposal field, and the soil surrounding the disposal field. The system can handle body wastes, wash water, and laundry wastes, including moderate amounts of bleach.

The Septic Tank

The septic tank is a large buried tank, usually made from concrete. (Steel tanks tend to rust and leak and should be replaced.) All wastewater from your house, including toilet, shower, kitchen, and laundry waste, should flow into the tank. In the tank, heavier solids settle to form sludge; fat and grease float to the top to form a layer of scum. Partly treated effluent leaves the tank and flows to the disposal field.



Disposal Field

The disposal field is either a trench or a large bed containing perforated pipes, crushed rock, filtered sand, and possibly sand buffers. A pipe with no holes runs from the septic tank. Effluent is dispersed through the perforated pipes situated in the gravel. Where the soil drains poorly it may be necessary to build the field in a mound of imported sand.

The Soil

The effluent filters through the soil or imported sand and receives further treatment. The soil removes solids, including bacte-

MAINTAINING YOUR ON-SITE SYSTEM

It's important to pump the system regularly. Over time, sludge and scum accumulates in the septic tank. These solids may reach the outlet pipe, and flow into the disposal field, blocking the perforated pipes. A clogged system can:

- pollute sources of drinking water

contaminate the environment

be expensive to repair

reduce property value

- harm your health

- be unsightly and cause foul odours.



RECOGNIZE THE WARNING SIGNS

Signs that could mean your system is malfunctioning:

- Sewage backing up into toilets, tubs, or sinks.
- Plumbing fixtures draining slowly.
- The smell of raw sewage or raw sewage on the ground.
- Soggy spots on the disposal field.

If a system malfunctions, the Nova Scotia Department of the Environment will require you to replace or upgrade your system. Contact your local Department of the Environment office to start the process.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR ON-SITE SYSTEM



Do's

- Have your septic tank inspected two years after installation to determine pumping intervals. Record maintenance and pump outs.
- Spread automatic washer use over the week rather than washing many loads on one day.
- Use an automatic washer with a lint trap you clean by hand.
- Install an effluent filter to protect your system.
- Use water saving devices such as low-flush toilets, toilet dams, and low-flow showerheads.
- Record the location of the septic tank and disposal field for future reference.
- Check any pumps, siphons, other moving parts plus the interceptor drain regularly.
- Remove trees with large roots or keep them from growing near the disposal field.
- Keep a healthy grass cover over the disposal field to stop erosion.
- Keep surface water from uphill or roof drains away from the disposal field.

DON'T FLUSH:

coffee grounds
disposable diapers
sanitary napkins
cigarette butts
pesticides
paints
thinners
photographic chemicals
other chemical wastes

waste oils
cotton swabs
hair
varnishes
dental floss
kitty litter
tampons
condoms



We are changing how we deal with home sewage disposal systems. Beginning April 15, 2000, private-sector specialists certified by the department as Qualified Persons will assess lots and choose or design on-site sewage disposal systems. The department charges a processing fee, while private sector costs will depend on supply and demand.

DON'TS

- Don't overload the system with high volumes of water
- Don't discharge water treatment backwash to the on site sewage disposal system.
- Don't allow large amounts of fats, plastics, chemicals or solvents to enter the system.
- Don't enter a pumped septic tank: sewer gases can be fatal.
- Don't wait for the warning signs to inspect and pump the system.
- Don't allow vehicles or heavy equipment to drive over the disposal field as they could crush the pipes.

CONTACTS

For more information, contact your local Department of the Environment office.

Amherst (902) 667-6205
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