



SEPTIC SYSTEMS: HOW TO KEEP YOURS RUNNING SMOOTHLY

Introduction

A septic system represents a major investment for a homeowner. Due to Hancock County's generally poor soils, a septic system can be even more expensive than in some parts of Maine. Many home owners are under the impression that a septic system will work forever without maintenance. However, most septic systems, even if properly maintained, will run effectively for an average of 15 to 25 years. The keys are to watch how much and what you put into the system and proper maintenance.

With proper care, septic systems should run smoothly for many years. This brochure has some useful tips.

TIPS FOR INSIDE THE HOUSE:

1. Be conservative in water use. Repair leaking faucets and toilets. Excessive water use causes suspended solids and oil/grease to enter a leach field, impairing its function. A septic system for a three-bedroom house is designed to accommodate 450 gallons a day. A leaky toilet can cause flows between 50 and 2,000 gallons a day;
2. Assure that any water purification system you install doesn't result in backwash. Many systems use salt that can affect the operation of the septic system;
3. Avoid using garbage disposals since they add an average of 50 percent more solids to a system. The more solids, the sooner the system will fail. Food scraps that don't contain fats or animal products can be composted in the backyard;

4. Don't pour grease, oils, or paint products down the drain. They can cause system failure in a short period of time. Kitchen grease can be poured into a can and disposed off with household trash. There are regular Household Hazardous Waste collections for toxic household products;



5. Don't flush feminine hygiene products, cat litter and other non-biodegradable products down the toilet. Similarly don't flush medications, particularly antibiotics. These can kill the bacteria that operate in the septic tank. There are periodic public collections for unused medications;
6. Avoid using commercially sold drain cleaners. They will disrupt the natural digestion processes of the septic system. (A "green" alternative to unplug a drain is a mixture of vinegar and baking soda or simply pour some

boiling water down the drain weekly);

- 7. Don't use commercially sold septic tank additives. They kill off the natural microorganisms that treat wastewater; and



- 8. Avoid running small, consecutive loads of laundry. Too much water entering the system at one time can result in it being flushed out. Also, washing machine lint is a solid that can clog the pore space in the leach field soil and contribute to system failure. There are commercially available Septic Protector Laundry Filters that can be attached to a washing machine. The filters are available on-line at some major chain hardware stores.

Prepared by Hancock County Planning Commission with funding by the USDA Rural Utilities Service. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the funding agency.

WHAT CAN BE DONE IN THE YARD TO PROMOTE SMOOTH FUNCTIONING OF YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM?

There are also steps you can take outside to protect your system:

- 1. Mark your septic system so it can be protected from vehicles;
- 2. Plant shrubs, trees and grasses downhill from the system. They will absorb the excess nutrients and water. Keep small trees and shrubs at least ten feet away from the leach field and large trees at least 20 feet away;
- 3. Pump your tank as needed. Depending on the number of people in the household, pumping may be needed between every three to five years.



WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS THAT A SYSTEM IS IN TROUBLE?

- 1. A noticeable odor near the septic tank or leach field;
- 2. Greener vegetation over the leach field than elsewhere on the property;
- 3. Pooling of water over the septic tank and leach field; and
- 4. Slow running drains and toilets.



If you notice these symptoms contact a licensed site evaluator.

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