

WHAT EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THEIR SEPTIC TANK SYSTEM

If you are like most homeowners, you know very little about your septic tank system. This is understandable, because it is underground; some of us feel “out of sight, out of mind”. All household waste that goes down a drain is disposed of through your septic system. To see if you know enough about your septic system, answer the following questions, so your septic system won't become a huge aggravation, public nuisance, health hazard and financial burden.

- Do you know what your septic tank is and where it is?
- Do you know what causes septic systems to fail?
- Do you know what it costs to replace a faulty septic system?
- Do you know that a faulty septic system creates health hazard and pollutes the ground water?

These are very serious questions. The health of your family and the value of your property rely heavily upon the answers to these questions which you will find as you read on.

1. How does your septic system work?

A septic system is an airtight tank that is linked to another tank, a seepage pit, or a distribution field. The first tank stores and treats liquid waste, and the second tank allows the treated liquid to be distributed into the soil.

Here's how it works. Wastewater enters the first tank and settles into three layers. The heaviest material, sludge, sinks to the bottom and becomes a layer of solids. The lightest material, greases, oils, soaps, etc., float to the top of the tank to form a scum layer. Left in the middle is a layer of liquids called effluent. When wastewater leaves your washer or toilet, it enters the septic tank and pushes the liquid effluent out of the tank and into the seepage pit. There, the liquid effluent is absorbed into the soil and broken down by natural chemical processes.

2. Bacteria must be present in your septic tank to digest the organic solids. Normal household waste provides enough bacteria to digest the solid UNLESS any harm is done to the bacteria. Bacteria are very sensitive to environmental changes. Many home-care products used in most homes every day will destroy bacteria. Check the labels of products you normally use. Labels carrying any of the following warnings will kill bacteria.

- Harmful or fatal if swallowed
- Avoid contact with the skin
- Do not get in open cuts or sores

- If comes in contact with eyes, call a physician immediately

Check the following list. These are commonly used home-care products that will kill bacteria necessary for proper septic tank operation. Many of these products are used in most homes on a daily basis:

Detergents	bleach	polishes	disinfectants
Acids	sink & tub cleaner's	toilet cleaners	cleaning compounds
Caustic drain openers			

People do not think of the effect of these products on their septic system when the products go down the drain. What kind of effect do you think anti-septics have on your septic tank?

Bacteria must be present to digest and liquefy the scum. If not digested, the scum will accumulate until it overflows, clogging the soil absorption area.

3. Septic System Maintenance means two simple things. First, sludge that accumulates in the bottom of the tank must be pumped out periodically. If not pumped out, it will eventually overflow into the soil absorption area. This will clog the system, and it will need to be replaced, at enormous expense and inconvenience.

Your septic tank could be overflowing solid material into the soil right now, and you won't know it until it blocks the soil so badly that no more drainage is possible. This is fact: a neglected system will get blocked; it will overflow; it will have an obnoxious odor; it will contaminate and pollute. It will probably have to be replaced. The first septic system "emergency" usually marks the beginning of the end. Replacement costs vary check you local phone directory for contractors and verify with your local Municipality for information about proper certification.

4. What are the signs of a failing system?

1. Sluggishness when flushing toilet.
2. Plumbing back ups in sinks, bathtubs, showers, etc.
3. Gurgling sounds in the plumbing.
4. Grass in the yard growing faster and greener in one particular area.
5. Ground mushy underfoot.
6. Obnoxious odors inside or outside your home.
7. Low spots beginning to appear in yard, whether or not any of the above symptoms have occurred.

Don'ts :

1. Drive or park over the septic system.
2. Plant trees or build anything over your septic system.

3. Never deposit solids such as diapers, cigarette butts, facial tissues and paper towels into your toilet.

Do's :

1. Know where your septic system is located.
2. Have your septic tank (main receiver) pumped and inspected every 2 – 4 years by a licensed septic tank pumper.
3. Direct all storm water run-off away from the septic system.
4. Cut back on the use of laundry and dishwasher soaps. Also, don't send grease, coffee grounds or cooking fats down the drain.
5. Conserve water. Take shorter showers. Fix those toilets that run or dripping faucets. Install water-saving shower heads and faucet aerators.

Certified Contractors

For a list of certified contractors please visit www.mah.gov.on.ca, look under Building Regulations, Ontario Building Code. This page will provide a link called quarts, type in the contractors name or BCIN # to verify their certification and qualifications are up to date.