



How Healthy Is Your Septic System?

Fall & Winter 2008

Improperly maintained septic systems are a top contaminant of water resources in Rhode Island.

How Does My Septic System Affect Water Quality?

If your home is not on a municipal sewer, when you flush your toilet or pour something down the drain, it goes to a septic system. Eventually, that wastewater exits the septic tank and enters a drainfield, where it passes into the soil. The soil acts as a biological filter and continues the treatment process that began in the tank. The soil is able to remove harmful organisms, organic matter and some nutrients.

However, if your septic tank is not regularly inspected and pumped, it will begin to accumulate solids and overflow, clogging the drainfield. Not only can this cause your system to fail, but it also can spread disease and contaminate ground and surface waters.

Everyday Actions

Having regular maintenance inspections and pump-outs of your septic system will keep it working efficiently and can prevent costly repairs. However, there are also daily precautions that you can take to help your septic system function properly.



Think before you flush. Aside from wastewater, toilet paper is the only other thing that should be flushed. Using the toilet to dispose of items such as sanitary products, paper towels, disposable diapers, cigarette butts, and even tissues will harm your septic tank and cause you to need pump-outs more often.



Don't put food down your sink. Septic systems are not intended to dispose of food waste, coffee grounds, grease, or fat, and, in fact, they will harm the septic tank. Try using a compost pile for non-meat food waste; it will help you avoid paying for unnecessary septic system repairs!



Don't use a kitchen garbage disposal. Having a garbage disposal doesn't make food waste, grease, or fat any easier for your system to handle. If you do use a garbage disposal, it's especially important that you have a larger than normal tank, that it has an effluent screen, and that you pump out more frequently.



Don't rinse toxic materials down your sink or toilet. Pouring disinfectants, large amounts of bleach, drain clearing products, oils, and other chemicals down your sink, bathtub, or toilet will damage your septic system. Even rinsing paintbrushes in the sink or toilet allows enough paint to travel to your tank that the tank's function can be impaired.

Reduce your water usage. Water conservation protects your septic system because it reduces the load of wastewater your system has to handle. It also will save you money on water bills, and with a little practice, it's easy to do:

- Repair leaky faucets and toilets.
- Install low-flow water fixtures.
- Turn off the water while brushing your teeth or shaving.



Balance your water usage throughout the week. When your septic system receives large volumes of water within a short period of time, it can cause solids to move into the drainfield, resulting in a clog. Don't do all your laundry at one time; spread the chore out over the week.



For more information:

Visit the website: <http://www.ristormwatersolutions.org>

Visit the website: <http://www.uri.edu/ce/wq> and click on the New England Onsite Wastewater Training Program link

