

## Dos and Don'ts

### Inside:

**Limit the use of household chemicals.** Constant use of bleach, lyes, soaps and strong detergents or drain cleaners may reduce bacterial action and cause rapid accumulation of sludge and eventual clogging of the leach field.

**Wipe greasy dishes with paper before washing** to decrease the amount of grease and soap curd entering the system.

**Use a sink strainer** with mesh fine enough to retain coffee grounds. Limit the use of your garbage disposal.

**Use a lint filter on your clothes washer.**

**Regularly check plumbing fixtures.** A leaking toilet can add up to 1000 gallons of water each day to your system.

**Keep pumping and service records** on the premises, regardless of change of ownership.

**Don't** dispose of facial tissue, sanitary napkins, cigarette butts, tampons, paper towels, or excessive amounts of toilet paper into the septic system. These items will not degrade in the tank and may clog inlet and outlet pipes.

**Don't** clean paint brushes or dispose of paint into your septic system. Latex-based paint will clog sewer pipes and coat the soil in your leach field. Oil-based paints are toxic and will diminish the bacteriological action taking place in the tank.

### Outside:

**Inspect your tank each year.**

**Plant grass over the leach field.** However, do not plant shrubs or trees as roots can damage sewer pipes and may lead to shifting and settling in the field.

**Don't** use anti-freeze or kerosene to thaw a frozen tank. They will kill the bacteria in the tank and coat the soil in the leach field, thus increasing the chance of sealing off the flow of liquid into the soil. The recommended method of thawing a tank is with a stock tank heater or septic tank heater.

**Don't** wash or disinfect the tank after pumping.

**Don't** add yeasts, chemicals, bacteria, enzymes or other substances claiming to eliminate or reduce the solids and scum in your tank.

**Don't** allow large equipment, automobiles, or large animals on any part of your septic system.

**Don't** place sprinkler systems close to or on the leach field. All surface runoff should be diverted away from the field to prevent saturation of the soil.

## Substitutes for Common Household Hazardous Wastes

Although their use is not required, the following substitutes for common household chemicals will reduce the stress on a septic system and the environment:

**Ammonia-Based Cleaners:** Sprinkle baking soda on a damp sponge. For windows, use a solution of 2 Tbs. white vinegar to 1 qt. water. Place the mixture into the spray bottle.

**Disinfectants:** Use Borax—1/2 cup in a gallon of water. Deodorizes also.

**Drain Decloggers:** Use a plunger or metal snake, or remove and clean trap.

**Scouring Cleaners & Powders:** Sprinkle baking soda on a damp sponge or add 4 Tbs. baking soda to 1 qt. warm water or use Bon Ami. It's cheaper and won't scratch.

**Carpet/Upholstery Cleaners:** Sprinkle dry cornstarch or baking soda on the surface, then vacuum. For tougher stains, blot with white vinegar in soapy water.

**Toilet Cleaners:** Sprinkle on baking soda or Bon Ami, then scrub with a toilet brush.

**Furniture/Floor Polishes:** To clean, use oil soap and warm water. Dry with a soft cloth. Polish with 1 part lemon juice to 2 parts oil (any kind), or use natural products with lemon oil or beeswax in mineral oil.

**Metal Cleaners:** For brass and copper scrub with a used half of lemon dipped in salt. For stainless steel: use a scouring pad and soapy water. For silver: rub gently with toothpaste and a soft wet cloth.

**Oven Cleaners:** Quickly sprinkle salt on drips, then scrub. Use baking soda and scouring pads on older spills.

**Laundry Detergent:** Choose one with a zero phosphate content or use soap flakes with 1/3 cup of washing soda. (Before switching, wash clothes in pure washing soda to remove detergent residues.)

### Park County Environmental Health Department

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## Your Septic System

# Seven Homeowner Responsibilities



**Park County Environmental Health Department**

## Care and maintenance of your Individual Sewage Disposal System.

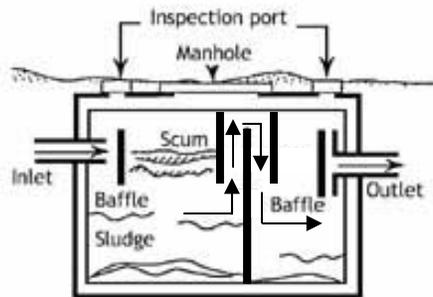
You, the homeowner, are responsible for the care and maintenance of your Individual Sewage Disposal System (ISDS). With reasonable use and periodic maintenance, your system should last a long time. Here are seven things you should do to insure your system remains in good working order:

- 1 Do regular pumping of the septage from the septic tank.
- 2 Locate the tank riser (septic tank lid) and keep it marked.
- 3 Understand how the system operates, including knowing what the minimum maintenance requirements are for your particular design.
- 4 Respond to a failing system with required maintenance, particularly when surfacing of effluent occurs or odors are apparent.
- 5 Do not dispose of hazardous household wastes in the septic system.
- 6 Recognize the value to the property by having a well-maintained system.
- 7 Keep records of the system design, location and maintenance activities (including pumping dates).

## The Septic Tank

The function of a septic tank is to separate solids and liquids in sewage. This is primarily a physical process of settling, although a considerable amount of biological decomposition does occur.

When wastes enter the first compartment of a septic tank, solids settle to the bottom and form *sludge*. Grease and hair float to the top and become a layer of *scum*. The middle layer, mostly liquid, flows into the second compartment where the process repeats itself. Finally, the remaining liquid goes into the leach (absorption) field.



Septic tanks should be cleaned before too much sludge or scum is allowed to accumulate. For a full time residence, the tank should be pumped every 2-4 years. It all depends on what you put down your septic tank. (Check the list of Dos and Don'ts on the back of this brochure.) If either the sludge or scum approaches too close to the bottom of the outlet device, solids will be scoured into the leach field and will cause clogging. When this happens, effluent no longer filters through the soil and will eventually break through the ground surface, and sewage may back up into the plumbing

fixtures. When a leach field is clogged in this manner, it is not only essential to clean the tank, but it may be necessary to construct a new leach field.

Although it is an unpleasant task, a yearly inspection of the solid accumulation is the only way to determine when a tank needs pumping. CAUTION: DO NOT ENTER THE TANK AT ANY TIME. SEPTIC TANKS CONTAIN GASES WHICH CAN BE FATAL IF INHALED.

- ▣ First, locate and remove the lid to the first compartment of the tank.
- ▣ Second, make a hole in the scum layer so you have access to the liquid below.
- ▣ Third, cover a long stick with a rough, white cloth and lower it into the bottom of the tank.

Pull the stick straight out. You will see two distinct discolorations on the cloth. The lowest will be the sludge line and the other the total capacity of the tank. The sludge line should be no more than 1/3 of the total capacity of the tank. If more than 1/3, the tank should be pumped. A list of licensed septic pumpers is available at the Park County Environmental Health Department: 719.836.4267. *Be sure to dig up both tank lids so the pumper can pump each compartment.*

