



Septic System Owner's Guide

The information contained in this guide is from factsheets produced by the University of Minnesota's Onsite Sewage Treatment Program staff. For more information regarding your septic system, contact Le Sueur County Environmental Service's staff at 507-357-8538 or go to the University of Minnesota's Onsite Sewage Treatment Program website at: <http://septic.umn.edu/>.

The goal of on-site sewage treatment is **to protect human health and the environment by safely recycling wastewater back into the natural environment in a cost-effective manner**. Effective on-site treatment of wastewater is dependent on proper design, installation, operation and maintenance of the system. A well-designed system will not properly treat sewage over its intended life without appropriate operation and timely maintenance! Good management of an on-site system will improve the performance and extend the life of the system resulting in reduced total cost to the owner with increased reliability and satisfaction.

By controlling water use, selecting appropriate products, and making wise disposal decisions, the homeowner can improve performance of the septic system and avoid major problems!

BATHROOM:

- Reduce use of drain cleaners by minimizing the amount of hair that goes down the drain.
- Limit use of antibacterial soap.
- Reduce use of cleaners by doing more scrubbing with less cleaner.
- Take short to moderate length showers instead of tub baths. Showers use less water than tub baths.
- Do not flush **flushable wipes, paper towels, cigarette butts, or personal hygiene products**.
- Do not dispose of unwanted prescription or over the counter medications in the septic system.
- Use moderate amounts of toilet paper. Toilet paper should break up easily in water.
- Do not use "every flush" toilet bowl disinfectants that are placed in the tank or bowl.
- Shut off water while shaving and brushing teeth (save up to 5 gallons per minute).
- Fill basin to wash hands instead of washing under running water.
- Do not run the hot water in the shower to warm the bathroom.
- Shut off water in the shower while lathering and shampooing.
- Repair leaky faucets and toilets immediately.
- Install low-flow showerheads.
- Take shorter showers.

LAUNDRY:

- Distribute wash loads evenly throughout the week to avoid overloading the system with large volumes of water in a short time period.
- Use the minimum amount of detergent or bleach necessary to do the job. This is often less than suggested by manufacturers.
- Use liquid detergents (powdered detergents may add fine particles to the sludge accumulation in the tank.)
- Use a water/suds-saving, top-loading washing machine to reduce water and detergent use. Use highly biodegradable powdered detergents if liquid detergents are undesirable.
- Select a front-loading washing machine, which may use 40 to 65% less water.
- Use laundry detergents that do not contain phosphates or bleaches.
- Wash only full loads. Adjust load level settings for small loads.
- Install filter on washer to remove lint.

KITCHEN:

- When using drinking water treatment devices, be sure there is a shutoff valve so the system does not run continuously when the reservoir is full. Some units may reject up to 8 gallons for every gallon retained.
- Use minimal amounts of mild cleaners as needed only.
- Do not use a garbage disposal or dispose of vegetables, meat, fat, oil, coffee grounds, and other undigested food products in the septic system. (Use composting or garbage service.)
- Use the minimum amount of soap necessary to do the job, often less than suggested by manufacturers.
- Reduce the use of drain cleaners by minimizing the amount of grease and food that go down the drain.

- Keep a pitcher of drinking water in the refrigerator instead of running the tap every time to get cool water.
- Install low-water-use dishwasher, use liquid detergent in the dishwasher.
- Hand wash dishes in the basin instead of under running water.
- Use low-phosphate (0 to 5%) dishwasher soaps.
- Wash only full loads in the dishwasher.
- Limit use of antibacterial soap.
- Install low-flow faucets.
- Repair leaky faucets.

BASEMENT and UTILITY ROOMS:

- Dispose of all solvents, paints, antifreeze, and chemicals through local recycling and hazardous waste channels. Consult local solid waste officials for proper methods. These materials kill valuable bacteria in the system and may pass through to contaminate drinking water.
- Install a water meter to monitor water usage.
- Reroute the water softener and iron filter recharge water outside the septic system. It does not need to be treated.
- Recharge the water softener as infrequently as possible to reduce water use.
- Route chlorine-treated water from swimming pools and hot tubs outside of septic system and away from drain field.
- Never let wash water from latex paint on brushes or rollers go down the drain and into the septic system.
- Route water from condensation in high efficiency furnaces outside of septic system (to prevent freezing problems).

ADDITIVES:

It is not necessary to use additives to enhance the performance of a properly operating septic system. If bacterial activity is low, it is because disinfectants and other products are killing the bacteria. Reducing or eliminating the use or disposal of these in the system will allow the bacteria to re-establish. Some additives cause solids to suspend in the liquids. These solids will end up in the drain field, causing significant damage. Starters, feeders and particularly cleaners are unnecessary, and may be harmful to your system.

CLEANING/PUMPING SEPTIC TANKS:

The septic tank has to be clean or pumped regularly to remove all solids from Septic System. The recommended time is at **least every 3 years**. Refer to your **Management Plan** for your pumping schedule.

PUMPS & FILTERS:

- All pumps and motors routinely checked for proper operation.
- Replace weak or faulty pumps and motors.
- Effluent filters cleaned or replaced regularly.
- Alarms on pumps and filters attended to immediately.

VEGETATIVE COVER:

- Mow but do not fertilize or water plantings over the drain field/mound.
- Any shallow rooted grasses or flowers can plant over a drain field or mound. Avoid deep-rooted plants, shrubs and vegetables over your system. If native prairie grasses are used, manage by mowing - do not burn over this area.
- Be sure water-seeking trees such as willows are located far away from the system.
- Stop cutting the grass over the soil treatment area a couple weeks before the rest of the lawn. The extra growth will help insulate the area, and will help prevent freezing.

**** Safety Warning****

- **Never go into the septic tank -- it lacks oxygen and may contain dangerous gases!**
- **Never Smoke near septic tank openings – Gases such as methane may present potential combustible**
- **Keep Vehicles and other Heavy Equipment away and off the Septic System**
- **Keep children, pets and spectators away from Septic System (components may be damages or collapse)**
- **Always remember that the liquids and soils can contain infectious diseases**
- **Immediately call a plumber or other qualified person of there is a smell of sewer in your home.**
- **If smell inside of home/building is very strong, evacuate the home/building or home until problem(s) corrected and gas is vented or eliminated**
- **Always remember to wash your hands thoroughly and change clothing before coming into contact with food, pets and people after working with the Septic System (capable of causing infectious diseases)**