



# Homeowner's Guide to Septic Systems

## SEPTIC SYSTEM DO'S AND DON'TS

### **DO's**

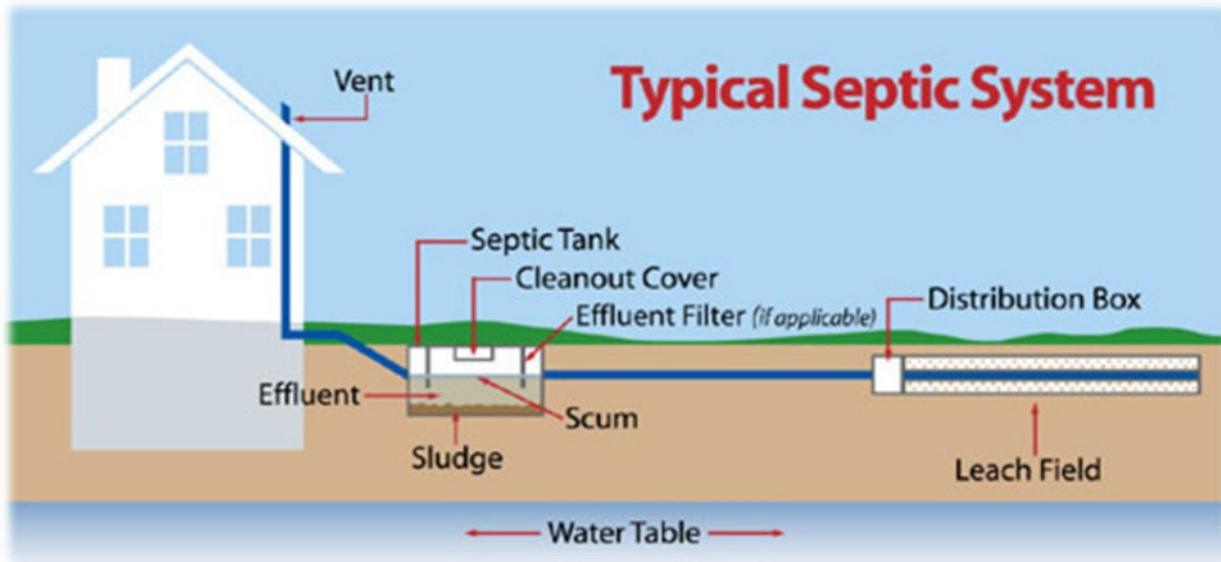
- ◆ Conserve water to reduce the amount of wastewater that must be treated and disposed.
- ◆ Repair leaking faucets and toilets promptly.
- ◆ Only discharge biodegradable nontoxic wastes into system. Look into "green" cleaning products.
- ◆ Divert down spouts and other surface water away from your drain field
- ◆ Know the location of your septic tank lid for inspections and pumping.
- ◆ Have your effluent screen inspected and cleaned once a year. This filter captures any solids to prevent them from possibly plugging the drain field and must be maintained and kept in place.
- ◆ Have your septic tank pumped regularly and inspected for leaks and cracks, typically every 3-5 years.
- ◆ Call a professional when you have problems; refer to our website for a list of certified septic installers.
- ◆ Compost your food waste or put it in the trash instead of using the garbage disposal.
- ◆ Make sure any water conditioning or softening equipment is approved for use with your system and that it is properly set for your water conditioning/softening needs and operating correctly. Backwash from unsuitable, improperly installed, or malfunctioning water conditioning systems can contribute to premature septic system failure.

### **DON'Ts**

- ◆ Flush sanitary napkins, tampons, disposable diapers, condoms, wipes, cat litter, or other such products into your system.
- ◆ Dump medications, solvents, oils, paints, thinners, disinfectants, household cleaners, bleach, pesticides, or poisons down the drain; these can disrupt the treatment process and contaminate groundwater.
- ◆ Dig in your drain field or build anything over it.
- ◆ Plant anything over your drain field except grass.
- ◆ Irrigate or water vegetation over your drain field.
- ◆ Drive over your drain field or compact the soil in any way; including pasturing large animals.
- ◆ Use a garbage disposal unless your septic tank was sized to handle the required sludge storage volume.
- ◆ Increase the number of bedrooms without expanding the septic system. The increased volume may lead to premature septic system failure and also may complicate future sale of the home.

### **SAFETY FIRST!**

- ◆ NEVER physically enter a septic tank or other parts of the treatment system. Call your service provider!
- ◆ Keep septic tank lid secured at all times to prevent accidental entry.



The typical septic system consists of two main parts: the septic tank and the drain field (or leach field). The first component in the system is the septic tank that allows the solids to settle and begins treating the wastewater generated in your home using bacterial action. The second component is the drain field where the wastewater minus most of the solids receives further treatment by the soil microbes before being dispersed back into the groundwater.

### USE WATER EFFICIENTLY

Reducing the quantity of wastewater generated will further extend the life of your septic system. Average indoor water use in the typical single-family home is almost 70 gallons per person per day. Leaky toilets can waste as much as 200 gallons per day. With toilet use accounting for 25-30% of household water use the newer high efficiency toilets can result in significant water savings. Similarly, energy star washing machines use 35% less energy and 50% less water than a standard washing machine. In addition, we recommend doing laundry in smaller loads on non-consecutive days to allow the drain field more recovery time. Faucet aerators and high efficiency showerheads can further reduce water use.

### MAINTAINING YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM

Having your septic system inspected at least every 3 years by a professional goes a long way in extending the system's life thus preventing expensive repairs and replacement. Also crucial is having your septic tank pumped at the frequency recommended by the inspector (generally every 3 to 5 years). Your service provider should inspect for leaks, baffle integrity, and look at the scum and sludge layers in your septic tank. If the bottom of the scum layer is within 6 inches of the bottom of the outlet tee or the top of the sludge layer is within 12 inches of the outlet tee, your tank needs to be pumped. Filters must be checked and cleaned. Pressure dosed systems with electrical float switches, pumps, or mechanical components need to be inspected more often. Proper alarm panel operation should be verified. The pressure distribution lines should also be cleaned whenever the tank is pumped, if not more frequently. Please refer to the Health Department web site, [cchdmt.org](http://cchdmt.org), for a list of certified septic installers in Cascade County.

***Please remember that a permit from the Health Department is needed prior to installing, replacing, expanding, or repairing a drain field or septic tank. Also, contact us if you need a copy of your existing septic permit.***



CITY-COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
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