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## Day-to-Day Guidelines for a Healthy Septic System

Septic systems are a reliable and cost-effective way to handle household waste and waste water in areas not served by a municipal sewer system. One of the differences between owning an unsewered versus a sewer home is that unsewered wastewater treatment and disposal systems need to be maintained by the property owner.

These suggestions will save you time and money over the life of most septic systems.

With proper use and maintenance, onsite systems can operate for years without much management. On a day-to-day basis, you won't have to think about it but following a few simple guidelines will help keep your system in shape.

Maintenance begins with sound water use and waste disposal habits. Since your family or occupants will determine which materials enter the system, we encourage you to set rules and stick to them.

Here is a partial list of the items to keep OUT. Do not introduce any of the following to your system:

- Grease or cooking oils
- Disposable diapers
- Feminine hygiene products
- Paper towels
- Plastics
- Cat litter
- Latex paint, pesticides or any hazardous chemicals such as bleach or other harsh household cleaners

Ask your septic contractor for a complete list of prohibited items for your custom system.

Many homes have garbage disposals to help manage vegetable and other food waste. Excessive use of your garbage disposal may introduce a high level of unwanted solids into your system. Use disposals moderately and consider composting as an option to handle vegetable waste.

Do not put too much water into the septic system. Excess water puts too much strain on the decomposition process and can cause problem. Target maximum water use is about 50 gallons per day for each person in the family. Estimate using the following numbers per person so you can keep track:

- Shower: 2.5 gallons per minute – 10 minute shower = 25 gallons
- Toilet: 2 gallons per flush (for toilets bought in the last 20 years)
- Washing machine: 40 gallons per load
- Dishwasher cycle: 10 gallons

With large families, keeping track of water use can be hard but laying down guidelines can help everyone do their part. Consider getting energy and water wise appliances when purchasing new ones. Visit [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov) for suggestions.

Be aware that your system is sized to handle the number of people anticipated when it was installed. If the number of people in your household has increased, you may need a larger system.

Do not use harsh drain openers for a stopped up drain. The best alternative to conventional drain openers is to use boiling water or a drain snake to clear clogs. Though it may be a little messier to do it that way, the chemicals in drain cleaners can cause havoc with your septic system.

Use the mild or natural cleaners for your bathroom and kitchen that are either approved for use in septic systems or ones that are marked biodegradable.

Be aware that bleaches and antibacterial soaps can inhibit the enzymatic action necessary to help bacteria break down the solids in the tank.

Harsh chemicals can cause expensive and unpleasant problems in your system.

If you use or intended to use a water softener in the home, let your installer or maintenance contractor know. In certain soil conditions, the salt recharge solution must be handled carefully and the size of your absorption field may need to be increased.

Have the solids pumped out of the septic tank on a regular basis. Your installer, a recommended and licensed septic pumping contractor, or your local health department can give you guidelines.

Remember, more sophisticated systems may require additional maintenance, so always ask your installer for details before they start digging so you can be fully informed.