

What a homeowner should or should not put into the home or wastewater treatment plant seems like common sense to those of us in the septic or pumping industry, but may not be as easy to determine for the homeowner. We have found that when we recite some of the many things that should not be flushed or dumped into the treatment plant we get a blank stare, or more like it is out the other ear. We have come across several items over the years that have caused problems for septic systems. We now try to provide a good horror story with each item we discuss about septic system usage to a new owner. It seems to work.

1. **SEEDS-** These are watermelon, cantaloupe, garden seeds, nuts, and any seed that floats in water. One client had been canning watermelon and had plugged up most of the holes in her pressure distribution system pipes with the seeds.
2. **BABY WIPES-** This product, probably made of space age polymers guaranteed never to decompose, float right through the septic tank, pump, and drain field. One installer reported having to drill them out of the holes in a mound piping network because they were plugged so tight.
3. **SANITARY NAPKINS, CONDOMS, Q-TIPS, DENTAL FLOSS, TAMPONS, HAND WIPES, AND DISPOSABLE DIAPERS-** See # 2.
4. **DRUGS OR PILLS, ESPECIALLY ANTIBIOTICS-** A severe decline in the microbial decomposition capability of the septic tank solids can result. It may take many weeks for the bacteria in the septic tank to reestablish. This can increase the solids building up in the tank and carry into the drain field.
5. **TOILET BOWL CLEANERS AND DISINFECTANTS INCLUDING BLEACH-**The weaker or more diluted the better. See # 4.
6. **SOAPS AND DETERGENTS CONTAINING GREASE EMULSIFIERS-** have you ever seen a thick, white chalk or lard like substance coating the inside of the manifold or sewer line to the drain field? Check on the type of detergent being used. No brand names mentioned here. An emulsifier suspends fats, grease, and oils in the water for a time. It is usually the time it takes for it to pass out of the tank.
7. **PAINT, PAINT THINNER, VARNISHES, STAIN REMOVERS, FABRIC CLEANERS, BUG AND WEED SPRAYS, GASOLINE AND OIL PRODUCTS-** These are volatile materials that can accumulate in the soil. One study showed a higher level of these compounds in a septic tank on weekends. Also see # 4.
8. **WATER SOFTNER DISCHARGE-** The calcium chloride discharge from the softener is another form of salt. One client was sure their water was too hard. He set his recharge timer to twice per day. When we arrived in August there was no lawn or any plant species growing in exactly the outline of the drain field. His water tasted awful, but it sure felt smooth.
9. **WATER-** You can't really avoid it but cutting back on it makes a drain field last longer. When we promote water saving devices for the home, the response is not always favorable. However, in the long run it will save money in bills and help to conserve our natural resources.
10. **HIGH EFFICENCY CLOTHES WASHERS-** Yes contradictory to # 9, a good idea because they use very little water, but they also create a lot of very fine lint. The two for a dollar sock filters are not fine enough to catch this lint. If this lint makes it to your field it will plug it up over time. We do offer a filter for the homeowner to install on their washer, and clean to prevent long term damage to your system.