

Septic System Owners - Ways to be Smart and Save Money

Getting your septic system on an annual inspection program and following smart operating procedures will save you money by avoiding costly replacements of systems and drain fields. The health of your family, the value of your property, public and groundwater drinking water supplies, persons or wildlife that enjoy and depend on local streams, can be harmed by inadequately maintained septic systems.

Please follow this checklist to make sure your system is functioning properly with the goal of returning only “filtered” water back into the ground.

1. Location and drainage: Locate your absorption field as far away from surface water as possible to avoid possible contamination. Redirect downspouts and snowmelt away from absorption fields to avoid flooding and incapacitating the field.
2. Annual Inspection: Have your maintenance contractor inspect your septic tank and distribution pumps every year, to measure the level of sludge buildup and inspect baffles.
3. Regular pumping: Pump your septic tank at least every three years, or more often due to inspection, manufacturer’s instructions, or municipal ordinance.
4. Maintain an open drain field: Keep trees and shrubs at least 35 feet away from your drain field to prevent roots from plugging or breaking pipes.
5. Avoid using a garbage disposal and dumping grease: Both of these activities add sludge to the septic system and prevent it from working properly.
6. Do not flush or pour old medicines or strong cleaners (like bleach) down the drain: These materials will kill beneficial bacteria that break down the waste. Some medicines carry specific guidance on disposal on the bottle, but most medicines can be disposed of in household garbage; ask your pharmacist for more details.

Sources: “Lake Notes,” PA Association of Conservation Districts: US EPA “Septic Smart”:
<http://water.epa.gov/infrastructure/septic/septicSMART.cfm>

