



Franklin County
40 East Court Street
Rocky Mount, VA 24151

Maintaining Your Septic System



*A Guide for
Homeowners*

"Do's" and "Don'ts"

Do...

- Learn the location of your septic tank and drain field. A sketch of your system is available at the Health Department.
- Have your septic system pumped at least once every five years.
- Pump your septic system every two-and-a-half years if you have a garbage disposal.
- Keep your septic tank cover accessible.
- Call a professional whenever you experience problems.
- Keep a detailed record of repairs, pumpings, inspections, etc.
- Conserve water to avoid overloading the system. Repair leaky faucets or toilets.
- Divert other sources of water, such as roof drains, house footing drains and sump pumps, away from the system.

Don't...

- Go down into your septic tank. Toxic gases produced can kill in minutes, even if just looking into the tank.
- Drive or park over any part of the system.
- Plant anything over the drain field or build over it.
- Repair systems without permits.
- Use septic tank additives. Some may be harmful to your system.
- Use a garbage disposal unless your system can accommodate the additional waste.
- Allow backwash from home water softeners to enter the system.
- Install sprinkler systems within 20 feet of the drain field.

What is a Septic Systems and What does it do?

A septic system is a wastewater treatment system attached to your home that consists of a septic tank, a distribution box and a drain field. All are underground. Septic systems are used widely in areas not served by public sewer. The purpose of a septic system is to carry wastes and wastewater away from your home and to treat it so that it is safe when it reaches ground water, which is used for drinking water supplies and recreation. Each part of the system plays an important role and must be properly maintained to function properly.

Why Should a Septic Tank be Pumped?

Once waste enters the septic tank, it separates into three parts - scum, wastewater and sludge. The scum floats on top of the wastewater; the sludge, or solids, sits on the bottom of the tank. The wastewater flows into the drain field and is filtered, leaving behind the scum and sludge. The sludge and scum, if not pumped out of the tank periodically, will flow into the drainfield and will clog the soil and cause premature failure of a septic system. Periodic pumping prevents this from happening. If you have a larger family, use a garbage disposal or make heavy use of your system, it is a good idea to pump the septic tank twice as often as required. The contractor who pumps your system can estimate when to pump your septic tank again.

What is the law in regard to pumping my septic tank?

Mandatory Septic Tank Pump-Out - every property with a septic tank or drain field located within five hundred (500) feet of the seven hundred ninety-five foot contour of the shores of Smith Mountain Lake shall have the septic tank pumped out at least once every five (5) years. In lieu of having your septic tank pump-out every five (5) years, owners of on-site sewage treatment systems may submit documentation every five (5) years, certified by a sewage handler certified by the VA Department of Health, that the on-site sewage treatment system has been inspected and is functioning properly, and the tank does not need to have solids pumped out.

Why Maintain Your Septic System?

There are many good reasons to properly maintain your septic system. A failing system can release harmful wastewater into the environment, threatening your health and that of your family and the community. A failing system also may jeopardize property values or result in the loss of a real estate sale. Repairing or replacing a septic system can be very costly and may be avoided by periodic pumping.

Do Not Flush

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------|
| Cat litter | Pesticides |
| Cigarette butts | Coffee grounds |
| Sanitary napkins | Paper Towels |
| Condoms | Tampons |
| Disposable diapers | Thinners |
| Fat, grease or oil | Varnishes |
| Paints | Waste Oils |
- These items overburden or destroy the biological process taking place in your system.

What are the Signs of System Failure?

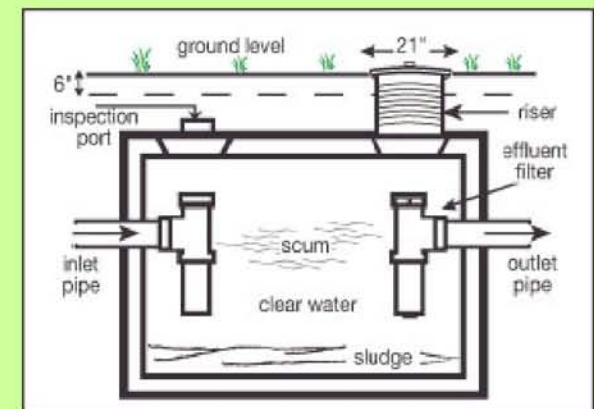
When a septic system fails, it is not always obvious. If you suspect your septic system is failing, please contact the Health Department.

Following are some warning signs:

- Slowly draining sinks and toilets
- Gurgling sounds in the plumbing
- Plumbing backups
- Ground is wet or mushy underfoot in the area of the drain field
- Dark-colored fluid seeping from the ground

When Should a Tank Be Pumped?

Homeowners with septic systems should have the tank pumped every five years by an approved pumping contractor. When your system is pumped, ask the contractor to report it to the Health Department.



Who Can I Call for Help?

If you have questions concerning your septic system or suspect you have a problem with your system, call the Health Department at 484-0292.



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