

# Operation and Maintenance of a Septic System

A properly installed sewage disposal system, consisting of a septic tank and absorption field, should, with proper care and maintenance, provide many years of service. The following information will assist you to enhance system performance, and extend its useful life.

## **Surface Water**

Do not allow roof drains to discharge to the septic tank or surface waters to drain towards the area of the disposal field.

## **Hot Tub and Swimming Pool Waste Water**

Do not drain the waste water from a hot tub, swimming pool or other similar facility into a sewage disposal system.

## **Water Usage**

Excessive and unnecessary water usage should be avoided. If automatic washers and dishwashers are used, make sure full loads are washed each time. Excessive use of water, such as doing numerous washings in one day, could flush solids from the tank to the disposal field.

## **Garbage Disposal Units**

Wastes from garbage disposal units are not easily digested by bacteria in the septic tank and only add to the volume of solids which must be removed by pumping the tank. Therefore, the use of garbage disposal units is not recommended.

## **Operation**

Moderate use of household drain solvents, cleaners, disinfectants, etc. should not interfere with the operation of the sewage disposal system, however, indiscriminate use may cause problems. Toilet paper substitutes, paper towels, newspaper, sanitary napkins, etc. should not be flushed into the septic tank since they will not readily decompose.

## **Starters and Cleaners**

There is no need to use commercial "starters", "bacterial feeds", or "cleaners" for the septic tank or disposal field. Some additives can actually create problems by causing solids to be carried into the absorption system, resulting in soil clogging.

## **Inspection and Cleaning**

The septic tank should be inspected at least once a year, and the tank pumped out when necessary. As a minimum, the tank should be cleaned every two years. Failure to pump out a septic tank when required may result in sludge or scum being carried over to the disposal field, resulting in soil clogging and complete failure of the system. The tank should not be washed or disinfected after pumping. The cleaning should be performed by professionals familiar with proper procedures and having adequate equipment.

## **Traffic Over Absorption System**

The area above and near a soil absorption system should never be used as a traffic area for vehicles, pedestrians or animals. An accumulation of snow is important in order to maintain a cover of natural insulation to prevent freezing. During winter months, it is recommended that a snow fence or other suitable barrier be placed around the absorption system to discourage any traffic on the area. This will help maintain a thicker layer of snow insulation.

## **Vegetation**

The area over a disposal field should have a good vegetation cover. However, shrubs or trees should not be planted over the area in order to expose the ground cover to sunlight/heat.

## **Increased Waste Loads**

If the waste loads and volumes of sewage entering the soil absorption system are greater than that for which the system was designed, failure of the field can occur. Contact the Environmental Health Office regarding enlargement, repair, load reduction and/or replacement options.

## **Vents and Accesses**

During the winter, airtight caps should be securely fastened on all clean-outs and monitoring pipes. These pipes should also be fitted with insulation plugs to help discourage the escape of heat from the soil absorption system.

## **Periodic Occupancy**

If the residence is used only periodically, or if extended absences occur, freezing problems can develop in the winter. Extra insulation (e.g., leaves, straw, sawdust, snow) over the system can help to reduce the freezing potential. When the house/building will be vacant for extended time periods, and there is a potential for freezing, it is advisable to have the septic tank emptied.

## **As-Built Plans**

A detailed diagram showing the exact location of the septic tank and disposal field, along with the application, permit, final approval, and photos of the installation should be kept in the home/premises for future reference. This will assist system location for servicing/repairs, and provide support for ready sale and financing.

For further information contact:

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