

Septic Systems: Another source of nutrient overload

Failing septic systems are a common cause of contamination problems in ground and surface waters. Throughout watersheds in Muskegon County, nutrients from septic systems are increasing as urban sprawl spreads farther than municipal sewers and homeowners are unaware that septic system care is their responsibility. A septic system failure can cause serious problems including sewage backup, human and animal illness, contaminated water supplies, and costly repair bills!

Here are some tips to keep your septic system in tip-top shape:

- Pump it regularly – usually every three-five years depending on the size of your tank, how many people in your household, and how much water you use
- Let the system work naturally - avoid septic system additives: some do nothing, some could actually harm the system
- Conserve water – heavy water use may not allow proper solid separation to occur
- Compost instead of using a garbage disposal – food scraps add solids to your septic tank resulting in more frequent pumps
- Flush responsibly – cigarette butts, paper towel, tampons, condoms, fertilizers, oils, and other items may clog and damage the system
- Avoid excess cleaning products – using excessive amounts of disinfectants and antibacterial cleaners (like every flush toilet cleaners) kills the bacteria decomposing your wastewater resulting in more frequent pumping
- Do not drive or build anything over your drain field – heavy machinery compacts the soil causing septic system failures
- Avoid planting deep rooted trees or shrubs in septic system area – roots can damage piping
- Divert runoff and snowmelt away from drain field – the system may flood or backup
- Keep records of your septic system to pass onto future owners
- Conserve water – heavy water use may not allow proper solid separation to occur
- Do not regularly water the grass over a septic system – in ground sprinkler system irrigation daily can overpower the absorption field

Proper maintenance of septic systems is crucial for the health of your family, neighbors, and the environment. A misused and neglected septic system results in disease-causing pathogens, hazardous chemicals, and nutrients such as phosphorus, nitrates, and organic waste entering ground and surface water, which could lead to human illness and polluted ecosystems.

With the coupon provided, you can receive \$50 off a septic system inspection (regularly priced at \$150) from the Muskegon County Health Department. **Offer will be limited to those systems installed prior to 1993 and will be valid to only the first fifteen requests between October 1st 2008 and December 31st 2008.** For more information contact the MCHD Environmental Health Division at 231-724-6208 or the Muskegon Conservation District at 231-773-0008.