

Maintaining septic systems

DON'T flush material that will not easily decompose, such as hair, diapers, cigarette butts, matches, or feminine hygiene products.

DON'T wash or flush medicines or hazardous chemicals like paint, paint thinner and bleach into the system. They kill the bacteria needed to decompose wastes in the septic tank and drain field.

DON'T drive over the septic tank or drain lines.

DON'T plant anything over or near the drain field except grass. Roots from nearby trees or shrubs may clog and damage drain lines.

DON'T dig in your drain field or build anything over it.

DON'T cover the drain field with a hard surface such as concrete or asphalt.

DON'T make or allow repairs to your septic system without obtaining the required permit. Use professionally licensed septic contractors when needed.

DON'T use septic tank additives. These products usually do not help and some may even be harmful to your system.

DON'T allow backwash from home water softeners to enter the septic system.

DON'T enter your tank, any work to the tank should be done from outside. Gases that can be generated in the tank and/or oxygen depletion can be fatal.

DO conserve water to avoid overloading the system.

DO use substitutes for household hazardous waste.

DO learn the location of your septic tank and drain field. Keep a sketch of it handy with your maintenance record for service visits.

DO cover the drain field with a grass cover to prevent erosion and remove excess water.

DO keep your septic tank cover accessible for inspections and pumpings. Install risers if necessary.

DO keep a detailed record of repairs, pumpings, inspections, permits issued, and other maintenance activities.

DO divert other sources of water, like roof drains, house footing drains, and sump pumps, away from the septic system. Excessive water keeps the soil in the drain field from naturally cleansing the wastewater.

DO have your septic tank pumped out regularly by a DEQ licensed contractor.

DO call a professional whenever you experience problems with your system, or if there are any signs of system failure.

Signs of septic system failure

Pools of water or soggy spots, foul odors, and/or dark gray or black soils in the area of your drainfield.

Water that surfaces over the drainfield during heavy rain or when doing laundry.

Sewage backs up into the lowest drains in the house.

Gurgling of drains, slow drainage (check for clogs first).

Soggy soil overlying the drain field.

You can avoid costly repairs by having your septic tank inspected on a regular basis for solids accumulation. When the solids accumulation is greater than 40 percent, have your septic tank pumped by a DEQ-licensed pumper. Contact DEQ for recommendations on how often to have your septic tank inspected