

SEPTIC 101

Your septic system works by utilizing a collection of living organisms that digest household waste. Many systems in Klickitat County comprise of a settling tank and multiple gravity or pressurized laterals to distribute effluent. It is important to avoid pouring toxins down the drain that kill the natural organisms used to break down waste.



- Avoid using chemical drain openers for a clogged drain. Use boiling water or a drain snake.
- **NEVER** pour cooking oil or grease down the drain. Let grease and oil cool, harden, and then discard it in the waste receptacle.
- **NEVER** pour paints, solvents, or large volumes of cleaners down the drain.
- If possible, eliminate or limit the use of a garbage disposal.
- Many septic tank additives sold in store are not necessary to keep your tank functioning as intended. You should also verify the additive is approved by the State of Washington before pouring into the septic tank.

Keep a well maintained area around the septic system, this includes the dispersal area (more commonly referred to as the drainfield). All water should be diverted away from the system. Ensure no ponding occurs in the dispersal area or around the tank(s). If ponding does occur around the dispersal area, try to limit your water usage and grade drainage away.

Ensure to protect the system from physical damage as well. Keep vehicles, heavy machinery, and even livestock off the tank(s), dispersal area, and the reserve dispersal area. With enough pressure lids can be fractured, pipes can be broken, and with enough pressure and water, soils can be compacted. Ensure to landscape your system properly, a simple grass cover is the best. Keep bushes and trees with large root structures away from the tank(s), pipes, and the dispersal area.

SIGNS OF SYSTEM FAILURE

- Water and sewage from toilets, drains, and sinks back up.
- Bathtubs, showers, and sinks drain slowly.
- Gurgling sounds from the plumbing.
- Horrible septic odors from the septic tank and dispersal area.
- Bright green, spongy, lush, green grass over the septic tank(s) and dispersal area.
- Ponding water near tank(s) and dispersal area.

Routine maintenance and proper operation is very important to increase the life of your septic system. Inspect the system annually and pump as needed. Avoid excess water use, and make sure everyone in the household knows what NOT to flush down the drain.

Failing systems should be immediately reported so action can be taken. A failing system can contaminate well water and nearby surface water, or become a nuisance to your neighbors. Report failures immediately to the Health Department and contact a septic professional to remediate the issue.

Routine Maintenance

If your system is a 'standard' system or more commonly referred to as a 'gravity system', then you should inspect it once one year after it was installed and then every three to five years after. You should consider having it inspected each time it is pumped. Septic tanks are essentially settling tanks – they allow solids to settle and scum to float. The baffle T should be drawing effluent from the clarifying zone. This is why it is very important to keep sludge, scum, and solids from blocking the baffle T. This can cause premature failure of the dispersal area.

Pump the system as needed. Routine pumping can prevent expensive failures in the future. There are 4 major factors that will influence pumping frequency;

1. Household size; generally, the more people in the house, the more often you need to pump.
2. Total wastewater generated; the more wastewater moving through this system the less efficient your tank may become. Try to replace leaky faucets and pipes, and consider using high-efficiency plumbing fixtures.
3. Septic tank size; with a larger tank you can decrease the frequency of pumping.
4. Solids; if more solids from waste, food, grease, or RV waste, are generated the frequency of pumping is increased.

A more proactive approach may include replacing old plumbing fixtures with efficient ones. Water conservation will extend the life of the dispersal area and may reduce the frequency of pumping. Consider;

- Using water saving devices such as faucet aerators, high-efficiency toilets, showerheads, dishwashers, clothes washer, and faucets.
- Repair and leaking plumbing.
- Take shorter showers.
- Take baths with less water.
- Try to wash only full loads of laundry.

REMEMEBER! The toilet is not a trash can. Avoid throwing any of the following down the drain;

- Baby wipes, cleaning wipes, or moist towelettes
- Feminine hygiene products or condoms
- Paper towels, rags, newspaper, cotton balls, or dental floss
- Diapers
- Cigarette butts
- Band-Aids
- Coffee grounds or cat litter
- Grease and cooking oils