

# The Scoop on Poop II

Last week, we went over the components of a typical septic system and the basics of how it works. Read below to learn more about how to keep your small-scale sewer treatment plant operating effectively.

## What Can I Do?

The effectiveness and longevity of your septic system greatly depends on how YOU operate and maintain the system.

Every time you use water in your home, you put your system to work.

### Everyday Use and Operation:

Consider the following.

Conserve water! Using less water reduces the load on your system.

- About 60% of water used comes from the bathroom (nearly 70 gal./day!).  
Think about taking shorter showers and not running the tap while brushing teeth or shaving.
- Fix leaking faucets and toilets.
- Install new water-efficient appliances, such as low-flow toilets & shower heads and front-loading washing machines.
- Wash only full loads in the dishwasher and washing machine.
- Large volumes of water entering the system in a short period of time may lead to clogging of the leaching fields and failure of your system. Spread your laundry washing throughout the week.



What you pour down the drain affects how well your system works. Do not treat the system like a trash can. Do not introduce toxins that will kill off the beneficial bacteria in your leaching fields. Limit the amount of non-liquids entering the system. Consider:

- Utilize the annual Household Hazardous Waste Collection (**Aug. 27<sup>th</sup> at NHS**). Do not pour paints, solvents, gasoline, antifreeze or other hazardous materials down the drain!
- Use the minimum amount of detergent or cleanser to do the job.
- Do not use a garbage disposal or put food, fat, oil or coffee grounds down the drain.

Protect your leaching field. Consider:

- The beneficial bacterial need air to function and survive. Don't inundate the area with too much water.
- Roof gutters should direct rainwater away from the fields.
- Soil compaction negatively impacts the fields. Do not drive or place heavy machinery on the fields.

## Maintenance

Even a properly designed and thoughtfully operated septic system will eventually fail unless sludge and floating scum are periodically pumped from the **tank**.

The sludge and floating scum layers that accumulate in your septic tank MUST periodically be removed. The frequency of cleaning depends on a variety of factors.

**As a rule of thumb, a typical septic tank should NOT go more than 36 months between cleanings!**

If either floating scum or sludge enters the leaching field it will cause expensive, and often irreparable, damage. Cleaning, or pumping, the septic tank involves hiring a licensed professional to open the tank's manhole to suction out the material that is in the septic tank. This requires pumping, flushing and back-flushing several times. Septic tanks have a finite volume that they can hold. If a tank is not pumped, solids get passed into the leaching fields. The fields are not designed to dispose of non-liquids, and they will likely clog and cause a system failure.

The dollars spent every one to three years on proper cleaning is much less expensive, and easier to plan for, than an unexpected and expensive repair or replacement bill!

### **Remember...**

**Attentive maintenance of your septic system and thoughtful water-use are the most critical steps you can take to extend the efficiency and life of your septic system and protect local waterways.**

