



When your home septic system fails, remember it doesn't just fail at home.

When your home's on-site septic system fails, it's more than a wet, stinky mess. It's expensive to repair and it's a health hazard to you, your family and your pets. And, the problem may not be limited to your yard. When you take care of your septic system, you are taking care of yourself, your wallet, and your community.

A good septic system takes care of most health or environmental threats posed by household sewage and wastewater. But septic systems need regular maintenance. Without it, they can fail and overflow. Runoff can then carry untreated sewage across your yard to your neighbor's property or into surface waters—lakes, streams or Puget Sound.

Public health impacts from failing septic systems can be widespread. Bacteria, viruses and other pollutants from the sewage can contaminate fish and shellfish and make water unsafe for swimming or drinking. Fishing and shellfish industries can be closed. Drinking-water wells and groundwater can be come contaminated. Beaches and waters can be closed for recreation, too.

A septic system doesn't have to be a problem. How will you help?

- ◆ Get regular inspections and maintenance. Check with your county Environmental Health office for advice. You may be able to do this yourself. The current state Board of Health rule for on-site sewage systems requires a full evaluation every one to three years for a system consisting of a septic tank and a gravity drainfield. All other systems must have a yearly evaluation. You may not need to pump every time, but it's good to budget as though you will.
- ◆ Choose a date or time of the year for inspection that's easy to remember. Mark it on the calendar.
- ◆ Learn how to keep your system functioning —what you can and can't flush or pour down the drain. No pet waste, medications, grease or toxic chemicals. If you have a garbage disposal, don't use it or use it sparingly.
- ◆ Keep trees at least 30 feet from edge of drainfield to keep their roots from invading. And never drive over the system.
- ◆ Watch for cues that your tank is nearing capacity or your system is failing. Got odors? Get someone out to check it right away. Then fix it, if needed.
- ◆ Conserve water. Too much can cause solids to escape your tank and plug your drainfield.

**Your on-site septic system.
Check it, fix it, maintain it.**

We all need clean water.

We drink it, fish in it, play in it. We enjoy all it adds to our lives. In fact, we need it to survive. Fish and wildlife do, too.

More than 60 percent of water pollution comes from things like cars leaking oil, fertilizers and pesticides from farms and gardens, failing septic tanks, pet waste, and fuel spills from recreational boaters.

All these small, dispersed sources add up to a big pollution problem. But each of us can do small things to help clean up our waters too—and that adds up to a pollution solution!

Bonus points!

Maintaining your septic system also helps you:

- ◆ Save big bucks and protect your investment in your home.
- ◆ Keep groundwater clean.
- ◆ Maintain good will with your neighbors.
- ◆ Support a healthy watershed.

WASHINGTON
waters

OURS TO PROTECT

www.ecy.wa.gov/washington_waters