

Treat Your Drainfield with Kindness

The area of your property where the sewage enters the ground is called the drainfield. It used to commonly be referred to as the leach field.

The bacteria in your drainfield use small pores in the soil as places to finish the treatment of your sewage. These pores occur naturally in soil that hasn't been disturbed in a very long time.

Disturbance or compaction of the soil in your septic system can close off pores used for treatment and disposal. For this reason it is very important to protect your drainfield from disturbance or compaction.

You can protect your drainfield by:

- ⇒ Not running over it with vehicles or parking on it (cars, trucks, heavy tractors, etc...)
- ⇒ Not building or placing things on top of it (pools, sheds, concrete slabs, etc...)
- ⇒ Not diverting water across the top of it (draining your pool or spa, roof drains, stormwater, etc...)

Perform Regular O&M Inspections

Performing regular operation and maintenance (O&M) inspections can catch problems early on and save you from having to prematurely replace your septic system.

Cowlitz County recommends inspecting your system at least yearly. For more information on what and how to inspect your septic system, contact the Environmental Health Unit.

Don't Fill Your Tank Up

The main purpose of a septic tank is to retain solids and keep them from entering the drainfield. To assure proper function the tank should be pumped, including the removal of solids, when needed.

Avoid putting items into your tank that cannot be readily disposed of by bacteria and will cause your tank to fill up with solids more quickly.

Some materials that will cause your septic tank to fill up faster are:

- ⇒ Coffee grounds
- ⇒ Bones
- ⇒ Sanitary Napkins
- ⇒ Diapers
- ⇒ Cigarette butts
- ⇒ Oils and grease (grease left from cooking dinner, etc...)
- ⇒ Food waste (i.e. from a garbage disposal)

Cowlitz County Health Department— Environmental Health Unit (EHU)

207 North 4th Avenue
Kelso, WA 98626

Phone: (360) 414-5599
Fax: (360) 425-7531
E-mail: omseptic@co.cowlitz.wa.us
Web: www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/health



Cowlitz County Health Department

Living With Your Septic System



Environmental Health Unit

Tel: (360) 414-5599
Email: omseptic@co.cowlitz.wa.us
Web: www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/health

Living with Your Septic System

Things That You Can Do to Extend the Life of Your Septic

Many people think of septic systems as flush and forget or don't think of them at all. In truth, septic systems are one of the largest investments, other than your house, that you have made on your property. When someone is connected to a municipal sewer system their monthly bill covers the cost of ongoing maintenance for that system.

For a septic system, any problems or maintenance costs are born entirely by the homeowner. Repair or replacement can easily cost from 10 to 20 thousand dollars and up. For this reason it benefits septic owners to treat their septic system as well as possible.

This pamphlet contains some advice on how to take good care of your septic system.



With a Little Help from Our Friends

E. Coli Bacteria Modern septic systems are designed to **TREAT** your sewage and dispose of it. Treatment is accomplished with the help of our little friends, such as Bacteria. For this reason it is important not to put chemicals/substances into your septic system that are toxic to bacteria. Killing the bacteria in your septic tank can lead to premature failure of your septic system.

What Not to Put into your Septic System

Cleaners

Everyone needs to keep themselves and their house clean. An important thing to remember is that most of these cleaners are designed to kill our friends in the septic system (Bacteria).

Examples of cleaners that may cause harm include:

- ⇒ Bleach
- ⇒ Ammonia
- ⇒ Floor cleaners
- ⇒ Anti-bacterial Soaps
- ⇒ Any other household cleaners that advertise their 'germ killing' abilities

You don't necessarily need to completely discontinue use of all of these products. Just be aware and look for ways to reduce how much makes it into your septic system. For instance, don't dump your mop water in the septic system.

Some things like antibacterial soap are unnecessary for most people. The anti-bacterial components of these soaps are long lasting and can be harmful to your septic system. Try substituting regular soap instead.



Medications

Some medications are designed to kill bacteria. These medications can enter your septic system through you and through directly dumping the unused portion in the toilet. **Never dump unused medication, of any kind, into your septic system.** People who are on Chemo-therapy or extensive antibiotics should consider using a portable toilet.

Poisonous or dangerous chemicals



There are many dangerous and poisonous chemicals in most peoples homes. Your septic system is the wrong place to dispose of these chemicals.

Never dispose of these in your septic system:

- ⇒ Paint or paint thinners
- ⇒ Drain opener/cleaner (use sparingly)
- ⇒ Gasoline
- ⇒ Motor oil
- ⇒ Pesticides
- ⇒ Fertilizer
- ⇒ Other left over chemicals

If you need to dispose of these substances, there is a disposal site for these types of chemicals in the County. Please contact the EHU for more information. **If the warning label on the product says dangerous, hazardous, or warns of health danger, don't put it into your septic system.**

Other Septic System Killers

Draining your pool or spa onto or into any part of your septic system can cause premature failure. The backwash from water softeners can also cause issues with your septic system. Point the drain away from your septic system. The same goes for roof drains, divert these away from your septic system.