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Tips for Homeowners

Homeowner's Manual. It's full of good information for owners of onsite wastewater treatment systems of all kinds.

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INSIDE THE HOUSE - Disposal Guidelines

There are a number of do's and don'ts that will help ensure a long life and minimal maintenance for your system. As a general rule, nothing should be disposed into any wastewater system that hasn't first been ingested, other than toilet tissue, mild detergents, and wash water. Here are some additional guidelines.

Don't flush dangerous and damaging substances into your wastewater treatment system. (Please refer to "Substitutes for Household Hazardous Waste," below.) Specifically, do not flush . . .

- Pharmaceuticals
- Excessive amounts of bath or body oils
- Water softener backwash
- Flammable or toxic products
- Household cleaners, especially floor wax and rug cleaners
- Chlorine bleach, chlorides, and pool or spa products
- Pesticides, herbicides, agricultural chemicals, or fertilizers

Don't use special additives that are touted to enhance the performance of your tank or system. Additives can cause major damage to other areas in the collection system. The natural microorganisms that grow in your system generate their own enzymes that are sufficient for breaking down and digesting nutrients in the wastewater.

Do collect grease in a container and dispose with your trash. And avoid using garbage disposals excessively. Compost scraps or dispose with your trash, also. Food by-products accelerate the need for septage pumping and increase maintenance.

Do use your trash can to dispose of substances that cause maintenance problems and/or increase the need for septage pumping. **Don't ever** flush the following down the drain:

- Egg shells, cantaloupe seeds, gum, coffee grounds
- Tea bags, chewing tobacco, cigarette butts
- Condoms, dental floss, sanitary napkins, diapers
- Paper towels, newspapers, candy wrappers
- Rags, large amounts of hair
- Baby wipes, medicated wipes, cleaning wipes, and wipes made of non-biodegradable material

Don't plumb water softener discharge brine into your wastewater system. (The softened WATER is OK, just not the BRINE that's produced during the regeneration cycle.) **Do** route the brine around your wastewater system so it discharges directly into the soil. This is a cost-effective solution that ensures the long-term performance of your system and the biological processes that occur inside it.

Water softener brine interferes with nitrogen removal. And it degrades treatment by interfering with the settling process inside the tank. Without proper settling, solids, grease, and oils are carried through your system, clogging components. This increases your costs by...

- Requiring the tank to be pumped more often (at hundreds of dollars per pumpout)
- Requiring filters to be cleaned more often
- Fouling drainfields and other downstream equipment

Do keep lint out of your wastewater treatment system by cleaning the lint filters on your washing machine and dryer before every load. Installing a supplemental lint filter on your washing machine would be a good precautionary measure. (This normally takes just a few minutes. Lint and other such materials can make a big difference in the frequency and cost

INSIDE THE HOUSE - Water Use Guidelines

Don't ignore leaky plumbing fixtures; repair them. A leaky toilet can waste up to 2,000 gallons (7,500 liters) of water in a single day. That's 10-20 times more water than a house-hold's typical daily usage. Leaky plumbing fixtures increase your water bill, waste natural resources, and overload your system.

Don't use excessive amounts of water. Using 50 gallons (200 liters) per person per day is typical. If your household does not practice any of the "water conserving tips" below, you may be using too much water:

- Take shorter showers or take baths with a partially filled tub. Be cautious about excessive use of large soaking tubs.
- Don't let water run unnecessarily while brushing teeth or washing hands, food, dishes, etc.
- Wash dishes and clothes when you have a full load.
- When possible, avoid doing several loads in one day.
- Use water-saving devices on faucets and shower heads.
- When replacing old toilets, buy low-flush models.

Don't leave interior faucets on to protect water lines during cold spells. A running faucet can easily increase your wastewater flow by 1,000 to 3,000 gallons (4,000 to 12,000 liters) per day and hydraulically overload your system. Instead, properly insulate or heat your faucets and plumbing.

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

Don't enter your tank, ever! Gases that can be generated in the tank and/or oxygen depletion can be fatal.

Do keep the tank access lid fastened to the riser at all times with stainless steel lid bolts. If the bolts are lost or damaged, call your service provider **immediately** for bolts. Or call Orengo at (800) 348-9843 or +1 (541) 459-4449. If the tank lid becomes damaged, **BLOCK ACCESS TO THE TANK OPENING IMMEDIATELY AND KEEP CHILDREN AWAY** until all repairs are made.

Don't dig without knowing the location of your wastewater system. As much as possible, plan landscaping and permanent outdoor structures before installation. But easily removable items, such as bird baths and picnic tables, are OK to place on top of your system.

Don't drive over your tank or any buried components in your system, unless it's been equipped with a special traffic lid. If the system is subject to possible traffic, put up a barricade or a row of shrubs.

Don't dump RV waste into your wastewater system. It will increase the frequency of required septage pumping. When dumped directly into the pumping vault, RV waste clogs or fouls equipment, causing undue maintenance and repair costs. (Also, some RV waste may contain chemicals that are toxic or that may retard the biological digestion occurring within the tank.)

Don't ever connect rain gutters or storm drains to the sewer or allow surface water to drain into it. And don't discharge hot-tub water into your system. The additional water will increase costs, reduce the capacity of the collection and treatment systems, and flood the drainfield. It can also wash excess solids through the tank.

AT THE CONTROL PANEL

of pumping out your septic tank.)

Do use substitutes for household hazardous waste. Replace the following hazardous products with products that are less environmentally harmful. The hazardous cleaners are listed below, followed by the suggested substitute:

Ammonia-based cleaners	For surfaces, sprinkle baking soda on a damp sponge. For windows, use a solution of 2 Tbs. (30 mL) white vinegar to 1 qt. (1 L) water. Place the mixture into the spray bottle.
Disinfectants	Use borax: 1/2 cup in a gallon of water; deodorizes also.
Drain decloggers	Use a plunger, metal snake, or remove and clean trap.
Scouring cleaners and powders	Sprinkle baking soda on a damp sponge or add 4 Tbs. baking soda to 1 qt. warm water or use Bon Ami. It's cheaper and won't scratch.
Carpet and Upholstery cleaners	Sprinkle dry cornstarch or baking soda on, then vacuum. For tougher stains, blot with white vinegar in soapy water.
Toilet cleaners	Sprinkle on baking soda or Bon Ami, then scrub with a toilet brush.
Furniture and floor polishes	To clean, use oil soap and warm water. Dry with soft cloth. Polish with 1 part lemon juice and 2 parts oil (any kind), or use natural products with lemon oil or beeswax in mineral oil.
Metal cleaners	Brass and copper: scrub with half lemon dipped in salt. Stainless steel: use scouring pad and a soft wet cloth.
Oven cleaners	Quickly sprinkle salt on drips, then scrub. Use baking soda and scouring pads on older spills.
Laundry detergents	Choose one with a zero phosphate content.

IMPORTANT CAUTION!

Only a qualified electrician or authorized installer/operator should work on your control panel. Before anyone does any work on either the wiring to the level control floats and pumps in the vault or the control panel itself, it is imperative to first switch the isolation fuse/breaker and the circuit breakers in the panel to the "Off" positions, then switch "Off" the power to the system at the main breaker!

Do locate your electrical control panel where it will be protected from potential vandalism and have unobstructed access.

Do familiarize yourself with the location of your wastewater system and electrical control panel. Refer to the panel's model and UL number (inside the door) when reporting a malfunction in the system.

Do remember that the audible alarm can be silenced by pushing the lighted button located directly above the "Push to Silence" label on the front of the electrical control panel. Hold the button until the alarm goes off. With normal use, the tank has a reserve storage capacity good for about 24 hours.

Don't turn off the main circuit breaker to the wastewater pumps when going on vacation. If there is any infiltration or inflow into the system, the pumps will need to handle it.

FOR ROUTINE MAINTENANCE

Do make arrangements with a reliable service person to provide regular monitoring and maintenance. Place the service person's phone number on or in your control panel!

Do keep a file copy of your service provider's sludge and scum monitoring report and pumpout schedule. This information will be beneficial for real estate transactions or regulatory visits.

Do keep an "as built" system diagram in a safe place for reference.

