



Caring for Your Septic System with the Lewis and Clark County Septic Maintenance Program

There are about 10,000 septic systems in Lewis and Clark County, and they discharge about 2 million gallons of wastewater (from toilets, showers, dishwashers, etc.) into our groundwater each day.

Many of these septic systems are old and may not work properly. They have the potential to contaminate our groundwater. This creates a serious health hazard for those of us who rely on groundwater from wells for drinking, irrigating, washing and other purposes.

That's why it's important for owners of septic systems to periodically inspect and pump their septic tanks — to make sure the systems are properly filtering disease-causing pathogens out of the wastewater.

The Septic Maintenance Program

The Septic Maintenance Program was established by the City-County Board of Health in 2011 in an effort to collaborate with septic system owners to help maintain their systems and protect public health.

When you regularly monitor the operation and maintenance of your septic system through this program, you:

- help to protect your family and neighbors from diseases transmitted through wastewater;
- protect the quality of groundwater used for drinking and irrigating;
- extend the life of your septic system;

When you regularly maintain your septic system, you help to protect your family's health and the quality and safety of the water you drink.

- help to avoid costly repairs; and
- comply with local regulations.

Reporting Your Septic Status

Under county Onsite Wastewater Treatment Regulations, you're expected to report the status of your septic system to the Health Department every 3-5 years, depending on how heavily you use the system and how often your tank needs to be pumped.

You may choose to report using an online self-assessment form , or you may hire a certified independent operation and maintenance professional to inspect your septic system and submit your report for you. If an inspection or self-assessment reveals problems with your septic system, the Health Department will work with you to resolve them.

For More Information

Lewis and Clark Public Health
316 North Park, Room 230
Helena, MT 59623
www.LewisAndClarkHealth.org
(click on Environmental Health)

406-447-8385

septic-maintenance@lccountymt.gov

Do Your Part, Be SepticSmart: The Do's and Don'ts of Your Septic System

Learn these simple steps to protect your home, health, environment and property value:



Protect It and Inspect It:

Do:

- Have your system inspected (in general) every three years by a licensed contractor and have the tank pumped, when necessary, generally every three to five years.

Think at the Sink:

Don't:

- Pour cooking grease or oil down the sink or toilet.
- Rinse coffee grounds into the sink.
- Pour household chemicals down the sink or flush them.

Do:

- Eliminate or limit the use of a garbage disposal.
- Properly dispose of coffee grounds & food.
- Put grease in a container to harden before discarding in the trash.

Don't Overload the Commode:

Don't:

- Flush non-degradable products or chemicals, such as feminine hygiene products, condoms, dental floss, diapers, cigarette butts, cat litter, paper towels, pharmaceuticals.

Do:

- Dispose of these items in the trash can!

Shield Your Field:

Don't:

- Park or drive on your drainfield. The weight can damage the drain lines.
- Plant trees or shrubs too close to your drainfield, roots can grow into your system and clog it.

Do:

- Consult a septic service professional to advise you of the proper distance for planting trees and shrubs, depending on your septic tank location.

Don't Strain Your Drain:

Don't

- Concentrate your water use by using your dishwasher, shower, washing machine, and toilet at the same time. All that extra water can really strain your septic system.

Do:

- Stagger the use of water-generating appliances. This can be helpful especially if your system has not been pumped in a long time.
- Become more **water efficient** by fixing plumbing leaks and consider installing bathroom and kitchen faucet aerators and water-efficient products.

For more SepticSmart tips, visit: www.epa.gov/septicmart