

# Information for Homeowners



# Caring for your septic system

## Are you the owner of a septic system?

If so, you are in good company. There are 27,000 septic systems in the capital region and that number increases annually by more than 500 new installations.

Your septic system can provide effective, long-term wastewater treatment, right in your backyard. If your system is working properly, it is an environmentally friendly and economically sound treatment option.

## Out of sight — out of mind?

Unfortunately septic systems are out of sight. Many homeowners don't realize that there may be a problem until their system is already failing. It is estimated that up to 20 per cent of septic systems in our region are malfunctioning. The most common cause of failure is lack of maintenance.

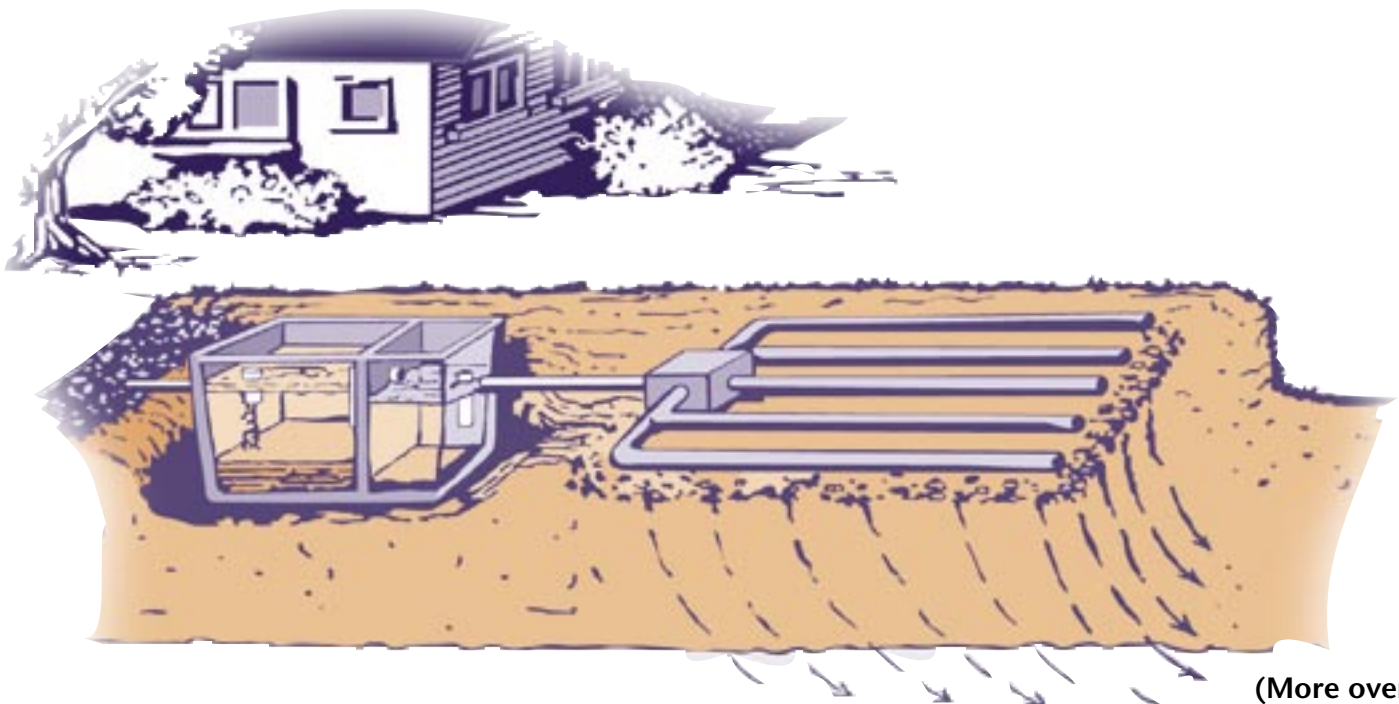
Proper maintenance has a significant impact on how well your system works and how long it lasts. Your home is one of your most important investments. Taking care of your septic system is like an insurance policy on that investment.

## How does my septic system work?

Wastewater from your sinks, toilets and laundry drains through a pipe from your home into your septic tank. Your septic tank is designed to hold the wastewater long enough to allow solids to settle at the bottom and oil and grease to float to the top.

Natural bacteria in the tank start breaking down the solids; however, eventually the solids build up and must be pumped out. Regular pumping will reduce the amount of solids entering your drainfield and ensure proper drainage and treatment.

The partially treated wastewater from your tank flows through an outlet into a distribution box. The box evenly distributes the discharged wastewater into a network of pipes underneath the drainfield. The wastewater begins to percolate into the soil through small holes in the pipes. Natural filtration and microorganisms in the soil remove any remaining harmful particles in the wastewater. The treated and cleansed wastewater passes into the groundwater and returns to the water cycle.



(More over)

## Signs of septic system failure

It is time to call a professional if you notice any of the following:

- ✓ Slowly draining sinks and toilets
- ✓ Gurgling sounds in the plumbing
- ✓ Unpleasant odours around your property
- ✓ Patches of lush growth over the drainfield
- ✓ Soggy or wet ground over the drainfield
- ✓ Sewage surfacing

## Why should I care for my septic system?

There are three main reasons for maintaining your septic system:

**Save money.** A failing septic system can be expensive to repair or replace. You can protect yourself against costly surprises through regular preventative actions like inspections and pump-outs of your system and by learning the do's and don'ts of septic care.

**Protect the health of your family.** A failing septic system can release inadequately treated household wastewater and offensive odours, often right in your backyard. Human wastewater contains disease causing organisms and can pose health risks to your family and your neighbours.

**Protect water quality.** We all depend on clean water. A septic system uses the environment to treat wastewater but may release untreated or partially treated wastewater if the system fails. Inadequately treated wastewater can pollute our creeks, lakes, shorelines and groundwater and can contribute to shellfish bed closures and contaminated drinking water supplies.

## How do I care for my septic system?

Your actions are the key to your system's longevity. Here are ten steps you can take to maintain your system:

1. Locate your septic tank and drainfield. You will be prepared if there is a problem.
2. Check the operation of your system annually. Look for signs of failure.

3. Have your septic tank pumped regularly. Health authorities recommend pumping every three to five years. Combine the pump-out with a professional inspection.
4. If you have a package treatment plant, set up a contract for annual maintenance.
5. Make sure your system has an effluent filter to reduce the amount of solids entering your drainfield.
6. Keep a running maintenance record.
7. Reduce your water consumption. Too much water use will flush solids into your drainfield rather than have them settle in the tank.
8. Use environmentally friendly cleaning products. Some chemicals can upset the proper balance of bacteria needed to provide primary treatment inside your tank.
9. Recycle or properly dispose of hazardous products. Do not pour them down the drain or put them in the garbage.
10. Protect your drainfield by leaving it as undisturbed as possible. Do not drive or park on it. Landscape with grass rather than plants with roots that can damage your system.

(June, 2005)

## For more information

### CRD Web site

- ▶ [www.crd.bc.ca/es/septic](http://www.crd.bc.ca/es/septic)

### CRD Hotline

- ▶ 360-3030
- ▶ [hotline@crd.bc.ca](mailto:hotline@crd.bc.ca)

### Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA)

- ▶ [www.viha.ca/mho](http://www.viha.ca/mho)
- ▶ 250-475-1858

### BC Onsite Sewage Association

- ▶ [www.bcossa.com](http://www.bcossa.com)

### Ministry of Health Services

- ▶ [www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/protect/sewage.html](http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/protect/sewage.html)