

1 An Introduction to Your Septic System



Over 28,000 properties in the capital region have septic systems. Many homeowners don't realize there's a problem until their system is malfunctioning. Knowing how to care for your septic system requires some basic knowledge — but proper maintenance will save you money, safeguard local water quality, and protect the health of everyone in your community.

Impacts to Our Environment

Septic systems use the environment to treat and receive our wastewater. Although there are many system designs, they use the same principles and discharge treated wastewater underground within the watershed you live in. Many of our local water bodies are suffering due to pollution from human activities, and septic systems can be a source of pollution if they're not functioning correctly.

Protect Our Health

All wastewater contains fecal coliforms, a bacteria present in the intestines of humans and animals. However, if coliforms are found in the environment, it can indicate that untreated wastewater is present. Untreated wastewater can carry dangerous viruses and pathogens like giardia, cryptosporidia, hepatitis and salmonella. When septic systems malfunction, they can cause untreated or partially treated wastewater to be exposed. For this reason, septic systems can be a significant health risk in our communities.



Signs of Malfunction:

- Slow drains and toilets
- Gurgling sounds in the plumbing
- Unpleasant odours around the property
- Patches of lush growth over the drainfield
- Soggy or wet ground over the drainfield
- Small white flies over soggy areas

YOUR WATERSHED

A watershed is an area of land that drains rainwater and groundwater to a common point, such as a creek, stream, lake or ocean. We all live in a watershed... which watershed does your system drain into?

Learn more at crd.bc.ca/watersheds.

Protect. Inspect. Maintain.

Protect your system by paying attention to what goes down the drain, as well as what goes over-top of the sensitive drainfield.

Inspect your system. If you don't know where your system components are located or if you don't have a maintenance plan, an inspection is a good place to start.

Maintain your system by having regular visits by an authorized person who will check the components and report on the operation and condition of the system.

Regulations & Responsibilities



MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Public Health Act & Septic Regulation
Standard Practice Guidelines
Policies & Guidelines



HOMEOWNER

Owns the septic system
Hires an authorized person to work on the system
Required to maintain system



AUTHORIZED PERSONS

Trained to design, construct & maintain system
Required to submit plans & filings to health authority
Submits diagrams & maintenance plan to homeowner



HEALTH AUTHORITY

Accepts filing documents & certifications
Investigates system failures & health hazards
Issues orders for repairs

If you are a septic system owner, you are a wastewater treatment system operator.

All septic systems need ongoing and proper maintenance. As the owner of a septic system, you are responsible for its proper operation, ongoing maintenance and record keeping.