Information Sheet #3

Water conservation & your septic system.

CRD | Septic Savvy

Water Conservation

One key to a healthy septic system is to minimize water use in order to keep solids well settled on the bottom of the tank. Septic Systems are designed to hold wastewater long enough to allow solids to settle to the bottom forming a sludge layer and oil and grease to float to the top forming a scum layer. This process of settling and separating achieves primary treatment.

If too much water is flowing into the septic tank, wastewater is pushed out into the drainfield before the settling and separating process has time to occur. The solids will be pushed out into the drainfield and can cause clogged pipes and clogged soil which is expensive to fix. In addition – older septic systems were designed when people used less water. This means your septic system may be under capacity compared to today's standards. If your septic system is older, water conservation is especially important for you.

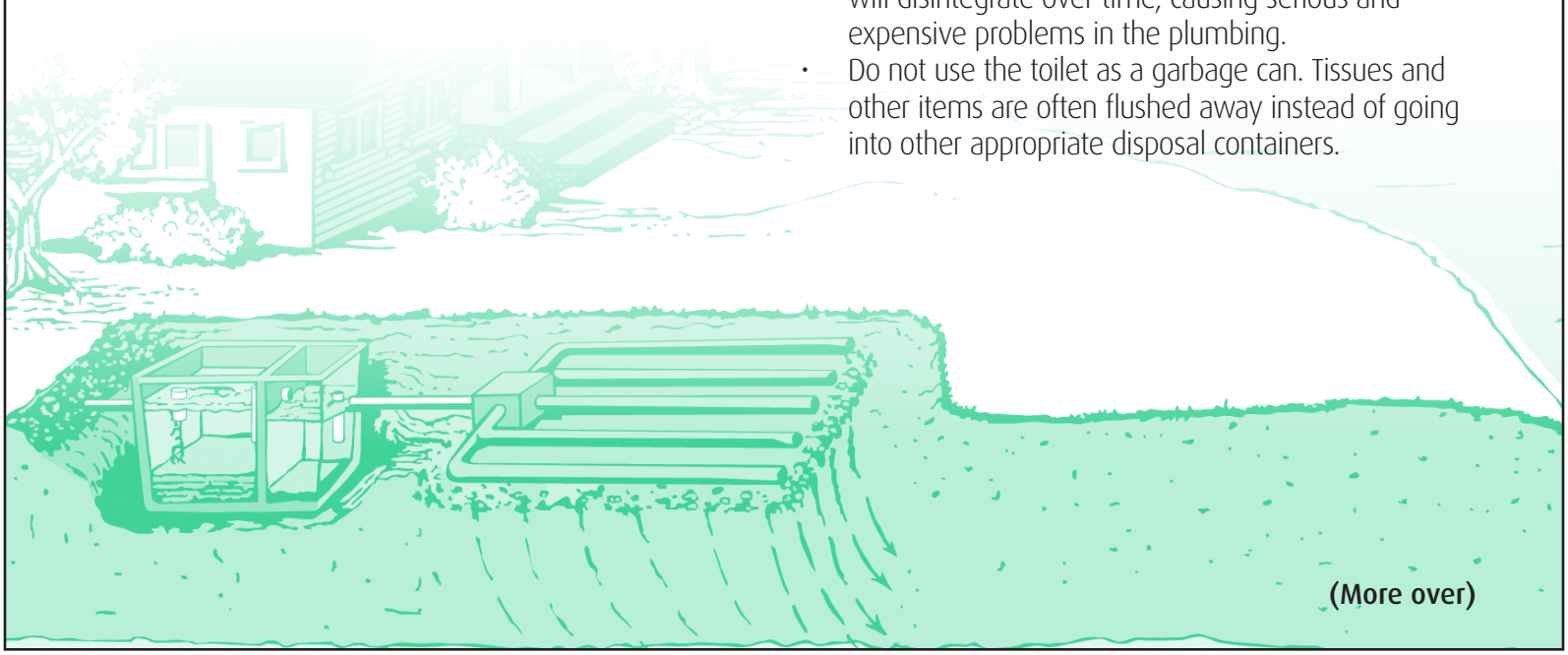
Tips for conserving water

Showers

- Reduce your shower time. If you shorten your shower time to 5 minutes or less, you can save up to 40 litres of water each time you shower.
- Replace your showerhead. Older models use 18 to 30 litres of water per minute while water efficient models use only 9.5 L or less per minute.
- Recycle unused water. While waiting for hot water to flow when preparing for a shower, catch the cool water in a bucket or water can. Later it could be used for your plants, pets or cleaning.

Toilets

- Reduce the number of times you flush your toilet with multiple uses before flushing.
- Replace your old toilet with a 6L flush model. Older models can use as much as 13 to 26 litres of water per flush.
- If you are unable to replace your water guzzling toilet, retrofit your toilet with toilet displacement devices. You can fill plastic bottles with water or pebbles and place one to three of such bottles in a toilet tank (make sure they do not interrupt the flushing mechanisms or flow of the water). This will reduce the amount of water used per flush. Caution: Do not use a brick as this will disintegrate over time, causing serious and expensive problems in the plumbing.
- Do not use the toilet as a garbage can. Tissues and other items are often flushed away instead of going into other appropriate disposal containers.



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Faucets

- Do not let the water run while brushing your teeth, you can save up to 22 litres of water.
- Do not run the faucet while washing your face or shaving; instead fill the basin with water.
- Retrofit all household faucets with water saving aerators or consider replacing with water efficient models. Aerators are inexpensive items that can be found at most hardware stores.

Dishwashing

- Scrape dishes instead of rinsing them under running water.
- Compost kitchen wastes (organic matter) instead of using a garburator. Garburators consume hundreds of litres of water each week and increase the pumping frequency for septic tanks.
- When washing dishes by hand, do not wash or rinse with running water. Use tubs or plug the sink.
- Operate automatic dishwashers at full capacity and/or set the water level for the size of your load.

Food Preparation

- Rinse fruit and vegetables in a pan instead of running water continuously and use the water for indoor and outdoor plant watering.
- Keep a bottle of drinking water in the refrigerator instead of running the tap for cold water.
- Plan ahead so that frozen food doesn't need to be thawed under running water or fill a bowl with cold water to thaw the food.
- Use a small amount of water and a lid on a pot when cooking.

Laundry & Household Cleaning

- Operate washing machines at full capacity and use the water saving features.
- Buying a new washing machine? Consider purchasing a water-efficient washing machine; they use up to 40% less water and 60% less energy than top-loading machines.
- For regular household cleaning use a pail or bucket rather than running water.
- Partially fill the sink or a container when cleaning the kitchen or rinsing cloths.

Leaking Toilets

High volume water leaks often come from toilets. They are hard to detect and are usually caused by worn or misaligned parts. A toilet that continues to run after flushing could be wasting 20-40 litres per hour – enough water to fill a swimming pool in a year. Leaks can cost you up to $240 per year.

Finding a toilet leak

To check for a toilet leak, use a dye tablet or food colouring. Carefully remove the toilet tank lid. Place a dye tablet or some food colouring in the tank. Wait about fifteen minutes without flushing. After fifteen minutes check the water in your toilet bowl. If the water is coloured, you've got a leak. Toilet repairs may require the assistance of a plumber.

Making a difference...together

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