Here are at least three guarantees in life. Most of us know the first two, death and taxes. Often we overlook the third item: poop. Every living thing excretes waste. How we handle it can have significant impacts on our quality of life.

Despite the popular belief that municipal sewer systems are the preferred method of disposing of human waste, there are events – system failures, the practice of bypassing treatment because of storm events – that allow improperly treated sewage to enter and contaminate our waterways.

A well-placed and properly functioning septic system is an effective method of treatment and disposal. If you own one, congratulations, you are a sewer manager. Its operation and maintenance are your duty and your system’s successful operation will require an educated, hands-on approach.

Follow the three supreme insights presented here — septic sense, scents and cents — and you can transcend to the realm of the fearless flush.

RELATED INFORMATION

This information was originally published and distributed by Washington Sea Grant.

Five homeowners’ manuals designed to take the mystery out of the maintenance and monitoring of your septic system were developed by the Washington Sea Grant in conjunction with the Frank Family Foundation and the Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team. These manuals — Pressure Distribution, Gravity, Mound, Sand Filter, and Proprietary Device — are available to the public. These manuals also cover operation of a septic system during heavy rainfall periods, electrical outages, and in connection with a recreational vehicle (RV). Also available are booklets on landscaping, pumping, and siting your septic system.

To order these and other pieces, call Washington Sea Grant Publications at 206.543.0733 or visit the Website at www.wsg.washington.edu/pub/publications.html. For more information, contact Washington Sea Grant at 206.543.6600 or wsg.washington.edu and click on “Septic Sense.”

F I N A L  T H O U G H T S

Now that you’ve gained the three supreme insights for fearless flushing, remember: your septic system is part of your daily life. Use your septic sense. Be kind. If you overuse or neglect your system, it will suffer and so will you. Feed your system as you would yourself — small, regular and well-balanced meals.

Proper operation, maintenance, and monitoring of your system will increase its longevity and good health — along with yours. Think about it. The effluent your septic tank disposes of is continually being recycled. How quickly the effluent goes from wastewater to drinking water is partly controlled by how well you oversee its operation.

An ounce of maintenance can prevent the headache of a cure, especially when it comes to septic systems. By practicing even a couple of the tips provided here, you are on the way to a healthier system and a healthier environment.

Supreme Insights to the Fearless Flush

By Teri King
Water Quality Specialist
Washington Sea Grant

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An ounce of maintenance can prevent the headache of a cure, especially when it comes to septic systems. By practicing even a couple of the tips provided here, you are on the way to a healthier system and a healthier environment.
One of the most important things to know is that you should not wash greases and oils down the kitchen sink, regardless of the amount of hot water you run after washing dishes. Running hot dishwater load after load is best to get your money’s worth on the soap and the most out of your septic system. Again, there are the questions of powder or liquid and phosphate-laden or phosphate-free. The same logic applies as with laundry detergents.

Running full dishwasher loads is best to get your money's worth on the soap and the most out of your septic system. Again, there are the questions of powder or liquid and phosphate-laden or phosphate-free. The same logic applies as with laundry detergents.

The words ‘Danger’ or ‘Poison’ on a label indicate that the product is highly hazardous. The consumer should stop using the product and call the manufacturer for instructions on the disposal of the hazardous material. The material safety data sheets provided by the manufacturers will have information on disposal of the materials on the label.

THE SEPTIC TANK

A septic tank is a buried watertight container made of concrete, fiberglass or polyethylene that is designed to pre-treat domestic wastewater. It clarifies matters before they go into the drainfield, for further treatment. The tank is designed to contain the solids and the liquid wastewater is pushed along into the drainfield for further treatment every time new wastewater enters the tank.

Septic tank additives are unnecessary since you contain everything needed to inoculate your septic tank with bacteria. Instead of spending money on expensive additives that are little more than dried bacteria, take yourself and your spouse out to dinner and come home.

If the additive claims to contain the bacteria you need to augment your septic tank’s bacterial load remember that milk carton you left out on the counter a while back. After leaving the half-full carton on the counter all day, it was bulging. In fact, it was teeming with bacteria that had generated on their own when the conditions were right.

In Washington state, makers of septic tank additives are required to prove the products do not harm the environment. They are not, however, required to prove they are effective.

THE SEPTIC SENSE – WHAT IT IS, HOW IT WORKS

A septic system is a very common, cost effective and safe technique for handling human sewage. Septic systems can take many forms. Some have bells and whistles that alert you to problems, others create hills in your backyard, and some are silent and hidden from view. Routine maintenance is much cheaper than emergency maintenance or repairs — and much, much cheaper than total system replacement.

Over time, septic systems require all sorts of maintenance. Check with your health department or local authority to find out what that serves your location. Even if you are not using a septic system, these guidelines will help your sewer system, too.

A common myth is that septic tank cleaners will break down the sludge in your septic tank, but there is no research to support this claim. Additives will break down the sludge in your tank, but they are not needed. If you use the right amount of water and let your waste sit in the tank long enough, the sludge will break down on its own.

Household cleaners. Household cleaners are any cleaning product that you use on a regular basis. Here are some of the most common cleaning products that you use around your house:

- Baking soda
- Vinegar
- Hydrogen peroxide
- Borax
- Castile soap
- Lemon juice
- Distilled white vinegar

Household cleaners are less toxic to your system than others. Labels can help you key into the potential toxicity of various products.

The CENTS OF SEPTICS – THE COSTS OF REPAIR AND REPLACEMENT

Some have bells and whistles that alert you to problems, others create hills in your backyard, and some are silent and hidden from view. Routine maintenance is much cheaper than emergency maintenance or repairs — and much, much cheaper than total system replacement.

Factors in the inconvenience of not being able to flush the toilet, take a shower, or wash your dishes. While maintenance can typically be accomplished all year round, repair or replacement might only be performed during the bits of the year.

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KEEP A NATURAL BALANCE

Some bacteria and archaea are naturally present in wastewater. They are the bacteria that you need to keep your system running smoothly. Bacteria and archaea are the key players in the decomposition of organic material. If you use too much water or let your waste sit too long, you can overload your system. Routine maintenance is much cheaper than emergency maintenance or repairs — and much, much cheaper than total system replacement.
saver, but it could be an expensive nightmare. Recall water. If you are not on a dosed or timed system, you could be flooding your drainfield without sufficient recovery time. ... laundry practices could be short-circuiting your system. Try to spread water usage throughout the week and over a day.

If you are in the market for a new washer, check out the low-flow models. Dealers and consumer groups can help you learn about new water-saving models.

THE LAUNDRY ROOM

Septic tanks can be made with one or two compartments.

We have talked about cleaning your body, the soil, and can help keep your drainfield in good shape. The movement of liquid into the soil and can help keep your drainfield in good shape. The movement of liquid into the soil and can help keep your drainfield in good shape.

The pumped tank should be made with one or two compartments. A simple drainfield relies on gravity to distribute the clarified effluent from the tank. Your drainfield takes the clarified effluent from the tank. Your drainfield takes the clarified effluent from the tank.

If the soils beneath your drainfield are saturated, they will be made with one or two compartments. "Concentrated" or "ultra" are words commonly used to describe the difference between the volume of liquid and the amount of detergent used. A garbage disposal grinds up kitchen scraps, so it's important to ensure that your drainfield is not being overwhelmed.

LAUNDRY DETERGENTS

First is the all-important decision — liquid or powder. Choose liquid if you have ever found white spots on your dark laundry, you wish you had used liquid. Even if you don't see spots, many septic tank pumpers report large cakes of powdered detergent in tanks. The contents of the tank should be pumped through the main lids only, not through the baffles. Everything should be removed out of every compartment; 'starter' is not needed to reactivate the tank.

Unsaturated soils are those that are dry and can absorb water so that you can see the physical condition of the tank. At the end of the inspection the pumper should refill your tank. Even if your drainfield is a holding tank, do not refill it.

If the soils through the soil with water, you can see the physical condition of the tank. At the end of the inspection the pumper should refill your tank. Even if your drainfield is a holding tank, do not refill it.

THE UTILITY ROOM

Does someone in your house use your utility sink to clean out paint rollers and flush automotive parts? Oil-based paints and solvents should not be allowed to enter your septic system. Your drainfield is a living collection of organisms prepared to handle waste from your body, not your autobody.

A simple drainfield relies on gravity to distribute the clarified effluent from the tank. Your drainfield takes the clarified effluent from the tank. Your drainfield takes the clarified effluent from the tank. A garbage disposal grinds up kitchen scraps, so it's important to ensure that your drainfield is not being overwhelmed.

THE DRAINFIELD

Check the label of the detergent you select. Is it phosphate-free? Phosphates are one of the nutrients that cause plants to grow, including algae in our waterways.

LOAD SIZES

GARBAGE DISPOSALS

If your wash load is too small, you will be diluting the proper concentration of detergent. Your drainfield is not designed to handle the proper concentration of detergent.

The first thing most septic system users learn is to avoid the garbage disposal. It might seem like a handy household appliance that every kitchen should have, but in essence it could be draining your bank account. Garbage disposals return a lot of force to the drainfield and can wash away a lot of the beneficial bacteria that help break down waste.

Composting is a better way to recycle your kitchen scraps. For information about building your own worm bin or compost unit, contact your local cooperative extension office.
A water bottle or commercially available kit is suitable for reducing the amount of water in the reservoir so that each flush does not contain as much water. Bricks have often been used to reduce the amount of water, but they can chip and break down over time, causing mechanical damage to your toilet and drainlines.

### Toilet Papers

The reserve area is a site on your property that is a great place for septic tank treatment modules or systems. Sand filters or aerobic treatment units (ATUs) are common choices for reserve areas. These systems can be used to overcome some site limitations by placing the highly treated or highly filtered effluent very close to the soil surface. The septic tank is then similar to a pretreatment unit.

### Drip Systems

Drip systems can be used to overcome some site limitations by placing the highly treated or highly filtered effluent very close to the soil surface. The septic tank is then similar to a pretreatment unit. By using sub-ground drip, this is an excellent method to overcome some site limitations by placing the highly treated or highly filtered effluent very close to the soil surface. The septic tank is then similar to a pretreatment unit.

### Low-Flow Toilets

To make sure your toilet's reservoir is not leaking into the bowl, add five drops of liquid food coloring into the reservoir before bed. The next morning if the dye is in the bowl, the reservoir must be repaired. To see how much grease and oil your soaps, shampoos, conditioners and other bath accoutrements add to your scum layer, take a sample of your runoff water and observe the scum layer. If it looks like an elephant was buried, you should consider cutting back on the use of these products. Some oils and greases are hidden in products that are labeled as “non-toxic” or “natural” and can add to your cum layer. Take the time to evaluate the quantity of soap you are using and consider a switch to a low-foaming product. You can also reduce the amount of foam by using products that contain soap without sodium laureth sulfate, which is a common emulsifying agent in many household products.

### Faucet Aerator and Low-Flow Showerheads

Faucet aerators also can help reduce the volume of water. Low-flow showerheads or showerhead aerators are also available to reduce the volume of water. If you have a low-flow toilet, be sure to check the flush pressure and adjust as needed. If your system is struggling to maintain adequate clear water, you may need to add a pressure booster to your system. This booster pump will help to maintain adequate flow and pressure to your system.

### Soaps

The type of soap you use in your bathroom and on your skin can add to your scum layer. If you are trying to reduce the amount of soap you are using, consider switching to a natural, non-toxic soap. Some soaps are labeled as natural but contain ingredients that can add to your scum layer. Your system is expecting to remove these ingredients, and it will be easier for your system to do so if you use a natural, non-toxic soap.

### Toilets and Tap Leaks

If you are looking for ways to reduce your water use, you can check your tap water for leaks. One of the easiest ways to do this is to check your water meter for any unusual movement. If you notice any movement, you should check you faucets and showerheads for leaks. If you find any leaks, you should repair them as soon as possible.

### Pressure Systems

If you are having issues with your pressure system, there are a few things you can do to help. First, check your pump and ensure it is running properly. If your pump is not running, you may need to repair or replace it. If your pump is running but your pressure is still low, you may need to increase your pump pressure. This can be done by increasing the flow rate or increasing the pressure of your pump. If your pump is running at the correct pressure but your pressure is still low, you may need to check your pressure relief valve. If your valve is not functioning properly, you may need to replace it.

### Conclusion

By following these tips, you can reduce the amount of water you are using and help to maintain a healthy septic system. Remember, your septic system is a living, breathing ecosystem that needs to be taken care of properly. With proper maintenance and regular inspections, your septic system will continue to function properly for years to come.