

SEPTIC SYSTEM CARE

Parts of Ada Township are serviced by Grand Rapids water and sewer. However, there are many properties in the more rural areas of the township that rely on wells for water, and septic systems for sewer. Few residents realize that a septic system has a life span that can be shortened by not taking the proper precautions, or conversely, extended by taking care of the septic system.

Signs of a failing septic system:

- sewage odors in your house or yard
- slowly draining sinks and toilets
- sounds in the plumbing like gurgling or plumbing back ups
- soggy soil surrounding the septic tank or drain field
- lush green grass or excessive plant growth near the drainfield
- excessive algae growth in nearby waters

These signs are a lot like the oil light coming on in a car. Though they can indicate a major problem, promptly pumping the tank and repairing any broken components as well as following recommended practices may prolong septic system life.

These are some of the many practices that will help you get the maximum efficient life out of your septic system. Septic tanks that are not pumped regularly will release solid waste into the drainfield. When this happens, the pipes can become clogged or the soil can cease to properly treat wastewater, possibly ruining the drainfield. Repairing this damage can cost many thousands of dollars and may require additional room for a new drainfield. Just because the onsite system appears to be working within the home does not mean that it's providing proper treatment, since the initial problems can go undetected. Some beneficial practices include:

- conserving water routinely
- installing low flow showerheads and other water saving devices
- diverting other sources of water away from the drainfield through the use of roof drains, sump pumps, etc.
- minimizing the use of harsh cleaners and chemicals such as bleach and ammonia
- limiting the amount of antibacterial soaps that are used
- using low phosphorus detergents and laundry soap
- knowing the capacity and location of your septic system
- not applying fertilizer on or near the drainfield
- not paving or building over a drainfield, and keeping vehicles and tree roots away from the septic tank and drainfield
- inspecting the septic tank at least every two to three years, depending on how heavily it is used
- pumping the septic tank every three to five years, or as needed

The following items should not be put down a toilet or drain: Feminine hygiene products, cat litter, paper towels, hair combings, disposable diapers, cigarette butts, condoms, coffee grounds, dental floss, gauze bandages, fat, grease, or oil paints, varnishes and thinners, photographic solutions, and pesticides.

Go to these websites for more information:

This site offers a 5-minute video on septic system maintenance!

http://www.ewashatenaw.org/government/departments/planning_environment/environmental_issues/septic_video

Access Kent

<http://www.accesskent.com/>

All Septic System Information Website

<http://www.inspect-ny.com/septbook.htm>

Coastal Information Clearinghouse

http://www.ncnerr.org/ccs/clearinghouse/septic_health/sh_alternative/

Kent County Septage Management Program

<http://www.gvsu.edu/wri/isc/septage/index.htm>

Local Public Health Department Locator

<http://www.malph.org/page.cfm/108/>

National Small Flows Clearinghouse

<http://www.nesc.wvu.edu/nsfc/>

Principles and Design of On-Site Waste Disposal with Septic Systems

<http://www.epa.gov/seahome/septics/src/title.htm>

Purdue Residential Onsite Wastewater Disposal

<http://www.ces.purdue.edu/onsite/>

U.S Environmental Protection Agency Onsite/ Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems

<http://www.epa.gov/owm/mtb/decent/index.htm>

