

Basic Septic And Plumbing Maintenance

By:

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Wherever you live, you will have some form of plumbing, be it a septic system or a town or city-tied system. Inevitably you will have some kind of problem with it. Here are some tips and guidelines that will help you take care of the most basic issues yourself without having to call a plumber! All-Clear Septic & Wastewater Services has put together this info to answer your questions and help you keep your septic system and plumbing working properly.

Before diving into what you should do to keep your septic system healthy, you should know why you need to spend a little time maintaining your system. Simply following these steps will help prevent some fairly common errors which can lead to very expensive fixes. Flushing the wrong things down the toilet or using the wrong additives can lead to costly repairs. One of the biggest reasons to be sure you are keeping an eye on your system is the health of you and the people you live with. Untreated waste can be dangerous and pose a health threat to people who come in contact with it. It can also contaminate drinking water sources and groundwater.



Before going any further, what you need to do is know what kind of system you have, and how to access it. If you live in an urban area, you most likely have a city or town sewer-tied system. Be sure you don't flush things which are not meant to be flushed, and keep harsh chemicals out of the drains. Some chemicals or cleaners may react badly with the pipes and cause premature deterioration which can lead to costly repairs. If you have a septic system, there are many things you should be aware of to ensure your system is effective and does not contaminate the surrounding environment. We will go through the basics here.

First, you will need to know where your septic system is, and how to access it. Many modern septic tanks have risers built in during

construction, or added at some point during an inspection. These allow plumbers and inspectors to access the tank and filters without having to search for the access point in the tanks. Having these risers will greatly reduce both the cost and time of an inspection or repair. If you do not have risers, seriously consider having them installed, and keep an accurate location map of the septic tanks until you do. Without an accurate location of the tank, a plumber will literally have to dig and search until the tanks are found, which is costly.

Now that you know where your tanks are, you should know how to check the filter and determine if you need to get it pumped soon. The filter is located in the inflow pipe in the septic tank. You should be able to pull it out and shake it off, removing a lot of the debris. Be sure to use rubber gloves when doing this, as it has untreated waste on it. Replace the filter after and be sure it is seated properly so it will work. If the tank is full when you open the cover, you know you need to have it pumped as soon as possible. Contact your local pumping service, such as All-Clear Septic, to drive out and pump the tank. You should also note if there are things floating in the tank. You should never flush anything that is not specifically designed for use in septic systems. If an item does not say “flushable” on the package, make sure it makes it into the trash can!

You should also keep track of the drain field, which is where liquids are drained into the soil once all the solids are collected in the tank. If you see there is standing water over the drain field, the grass is growing far more lush than elsewhere on the lawn, or there is a strange odor, there is possibly a blockage or some other problem with your system. You should have a septic professional come inspect the field and discuss how to get it fixed. Do not wait until sewage is flowing into the house before calling!

One thing many people who have septic systems forget is that you should not drive vehicles over or build heavy structures over the septic system and field. Your septic system is made of pipes and chambers which have a significant amount of open air in them to help bacteria process waste. Driving heavy vehicles over these areas, or building heavy structures over them will put unnecessary



stress on the system and possibly cause it to collapse. This will lead to a very costly repair or replacement of the system.



Along with driving or building over your septic, planting deep-rooting plants or trees around the system should be avoided. While you may not see any immediate problems, as these plants and trees grow, the roots can work their way into the septic system and crack the pipes or septic tanks, clogging the drainfield and possibly collapse parts of the system should the tree or bush grow too large! Be sure anything planted over the septic system has shallow roots and does not grow too

large in size. Not only will it prevent problems and reduce stress on system but it will make any future service calls far easier to perform.

Another way to prevent unnecessary stress on your system is to watch how many appliances are hooked up to your septic system and when they are operating. Washing machines, dishwashers, showers, baths, and hot tubs all use a large quantity of water, and should never be used at the same time. This large quantity of water, if drained all at the same time, has the possibility of stirring the solids in the bottom of the septic tank which can then make it to the drain field which reduces the effectiveness of the field and may clog the system. If you can, do not use showers, washing machines and dishwashers at the same time. This will allow the water to flow into the septic system and drain normally without stressing the system. Hot tubs should never be drained into the septic system. To drain it, let the water cool and drain it onto the lawn or other location away from septic systems, drain systems, or the home itself, and in accordance with local regulations.

Garbage disposals also put a serious strain on the septic system. Using one increases the amount of solids sent to the septic tank dramatically and decreases the time between pumpings. In some cases the ground solids will float on the surface and may even pass to the drain field which can lead to blockages or other septic failures. If you have a septic system, discontinue use of a garbage disposal to increase the life of your septic system and reduce the number of times you need to pump it.

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Household chemicals and cleaners can seriously impact the function and degrade the physical structure of your septic system. Most cleaning chemicals and cleaners should not be put down the toilet. Depending on the chemical being used, it can kill the bacteria in your tank which help to naturally digest some of the solids and process the waste in the septic tank. Without these bacteria, the tank will not function properly and will need to be pumped or serviced much more often. Hazardous waste such as gasoline, paint thinners, oils, paints, and pharmaceuticals should never be put into the septic system. This dramatically

increases the chance of polluting the soils and groundwater, and may cause serious damage to the septic systems' structures and biological processes.

One of the easiest things you can do to help maintain your septic system is to keep good records of installations, pumpings and service calls. With good records you will be able to help service personnel determine possible issues far easier as they will have a good history of the system and can help predict problems. They will also be a good reminder of when you should have the system serviced or pumped to ensure a long-lasting and effective septic system.

Remember, your toilet is not a catch-all for household waste. It is far better to put whatever it is in the trash than into the septic system to help prevent costly repairs and repeated service calls. If you do have questions or concerns about your septic system, don't hesitate to call All-Clear Septic and Wastewater Services at 508-763-4431 today!