



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

**Woodford County
Health Department**

Taking Care of Your Septic System

One of the greatest public health improvements since the early 1900s is the understanding that proper sanitation of water and proper disposal of sewage reduces disease. Woodford County Health Department Environmental Health staff work to assist with regulation of methods of disposing sewage from facilities and homes that are not served by a public sewer system.

Most farms, businesses and homes in rural areas have private sewage disposal systems. If you are not sure of the location of your septic system on your property, you can request that information from the health department. Knowledge of where exactly your septic system is located on your property will help you and licensed professionals maintain your septic system or address any problems.

Private sewage disposal program activities include:

- Approving plans for new and renovated private sewage disposal system installations
- Inspecting private sewage disposal systems
- Investigating private sewage complaints
- Issuing private sewage disposal permits
- Registering licensed Illinois private sewage disposal contractors

Septic Systems 101:

By helping to ensure that all sewage is discharged to a properly designed and operating waste facility, WCHD environmental health program helps eliminate transmission of disease, disease organisms, and nuisances.

Proper maintenance and care for your septic system is vital to help ensure proper functioning and life span of your system. Conventional septic systems have two main components. First, the septic tank collects and separates solid wastes from liquids. From the septic tank, the liquid wastes carry over to the second component of the system or the leach field. An example of a leach field may be a gravel trench, gravel-less trench, seepage bed or buried sand filter bed. In some cases, if a conventional system cannot be used, a self-contained aerobic treatment system can be installed. This system treats domestic sewage by combining oxygen through the use of an air compressor.

Buried sand filters and aerobic systems typically discharge the treated outflow (effluent) to the ground surface. Prior to discharging, these systems require chlorination to kill most of the remaining bacteria and organisms before the effluent comes in contact with the ground surface.

Basic Tips for Taking Care of Your Septic System

- Know the location of your septic system on your property; WCHD may be able to provide a diagram depending on when your system was installed.
- **Never enter into a septic tank. Toxic gases in the tank can be fatal.** Septic tanks must be pumped by licensed professionals.
- **Have the septic tank pumped every 3-5 years.** If a garbage grinder is present in the dwelling, have the tank pumped more frequently (1-2 years). Septic tank additives are not necessary since ingredients that help a septic tank function are naturally found in wastes. Some additives may actually harm your system.
- Private sewage disposal system septic tanks serving residential properties shall be evaluated within 3 years after the date of installation and a minimum of once every 5 years after installation. Depending on the system's use, the tanks and compartments may need to be evaluated and pumped more frequently.
- If an effluent filter is installed in the outlet baffle of the septic tank, the effluent filter should be evaluated and cleaned every 3-to-6 months to ensure proper operation; depending on use, the effluent filter may need to be cleaned more frequently.
- Know where the components of the system are located and have any damaged components repaired immediately; keep detailed records of maintenance and repairs.
- Do not build (ex: outbuildings, swimming pools, play equipment) or plant trees over or near any components of a system. For proper distance requirements, consult the Illinois Private Sewage Code.
- To lessen the burden on the system, conserve water usage. For example, fix leaky faucets, avoid long showers and operate the washing machine with full loads as opposed to partial loads. Space laundry loads throughout week to avoid overloading the septic system.
- Avoid introducing chemicals or household waste into the septic system (ex: paint, varnish, pesticides, or other household hazardous waste, fat, oil or grease).
- Avoid flushing or introducing non-biodegradable items (or items that can be disposed of by other means) into the septic system such as band aids, paper towels, coffee grounds, cigarette butts, condoms, diapers, dental floss, feminine hygiene products, or flushable wipes.
- Malfunctions that need a licensed professional could include: slow draining toilets and drains, sewage odor and/or back-ups inside or outside the dwelling, or unusual ponding or standing water.
- For surface discharging systems, such as aerobic systems and sand filter beds, make sure drain lines and vents are kept clear. Check chlorine levels monthly. If the chlorine in the feeder is depleted, add more chlorine tablets. Be sure to use septic grade chlorine tablets.
- An aerobic treatment unit (ATU) requires evaluation and maintenance at least once every 6 months. A 2-year initial service policy is provided to the property owner, and a continuing service policy should be obtained to continue the required servicing and maintenance of an ATU.
- If electronic controls such as audible/visual (A/V) alarms and pumps are connected to the septic system, regular, routine monitoring of these electronic controls is necessary to ensure the septic system is functioning properly.
- Remember that sewage contains bacteria, viruses, and other disease-carrying pathogens. It is important to maintain your septic system to keep it functioning but also to minimize potential health hazards.

For more specific questions about your private sewage disposal system or to request a diagram of your system location, please call Woodford County Health Department Environment Health at (309) 467-3064 or visit www.woodfordhealth.org.