

MAYNE ISLAND INTEGRATED WATER SYSTEMS SOCIETY
miiwss.com

Septic systems were a particularly popular topic at the MIIWSS August Fall Fair **booths**, and it's a topic where we seem to mostly be left to our own devices. Not only that, but we all live in financial fear that our good old standby (whose previous importance seemed minimal), is going to take revenge after years of being ignored.

Some haven't any idea where their tank and field are, others, when or how often to pump, and on it goes. Many are still ignoring one of the most valuable assets on their property.

We can do many common sense things to protect our septic tanks and the fields.

1. NEVER put anything down the toilet that you have not tested by ingestion first.
2. Respect the microbes and the work they do. They need feeding and it is you they want to be the server.
3. When you return from your fun in the sun, do NOT instantly do your laundry. Wait 4 or 5 days until the wee bugs are up and running after their vacation and inertia. They, again, need YOU to feed them well before you dump a load of soapy water on them, expecting them to cope in their weakened condition.
4. Make sure all of your water using appliances are low consumption. See the figures below and you will understand why dual flush toilets play such a huge role in both conservation and septic protection. Remember that your septic does need some water to function properly.
5. If your tank has a filter, make sure it is not plugged. It requires maintenance. If your system functions well, cleaning annually should be sufficient. The results of ignoring your filter will be Backed up sewage on the lawn and toilets that won't work properly.
6. Having your tank pumped is variable and not a regular dated maintenance item. You can make a pretty good judgement call by removing the tank lid and gently probing down with a stick. If the bottom sludge is up over 1/3 of the tank capacity, get it pumped.
7. While your tank is open, make sure that the fluids are not habitually over the field outlet. If so, pump asap. The solids and floating items may be 'drifting' into your septic field and will plug your bed piping---guaranteed money pit!
8. Map out your septic system. Keep track of the pump out dates and condition of your filter, if you have one. The older systems do not.
9. If your system needs to be revitalized, have some fun and invite your friends over for a beer party!
10. For those on ANY medications, remember that they will affect your microbe efficiency. Antibiotics are particularly hard on septic tanks.

Low Flush Toilet Figures

Following are some hard figures that you can cite when touting the benefits of installing low flush toilets and achieving major daily consumption reductions with no real conscious effort or lifestyle changes on your part.

A tip. Think ADA toilets. They are about 2 1/2 inches higher and easier for seniors---a stage we are all going to reach sooner than we think!

Remember that toilets represent fully 30% of the total consumption for any household.

Each of these examples is based on 5 flushes per day, per person, per household, final figures extrapolated to 2 persons per household.

13 litre toilet:

13L x 5 flushes x 365 days = 23,725 l per year

For a 2 person household, this puts toilet consumption at $23,725 \times 2 = 47,450$ L.

6L toilet:

6L x 5 flushes x 365 days = 10,950 L per year

For a 2 person household, toilet consumption equals $10,950 \times 2 = 21,900$ L

With a 6L, water saved over 13 L is 216%

3L dual flush toilet: factored on 3 flushes at 3L & 2 flushes at 6 L

3L x 3 flushes x 365 days = 3285 L

6L x 2 flushes x 365 days = 4380 L

Total annual litres for dual flush = 7665L

For a 2 person household, total toilet consumption is $7665 \times 2 = 15,330$ L

With a dual 3L/6L, water saved over 13L toilet is 309.52%

With a dual 3/6L, water saved over a 6L toilet is 108.33%

If we haven't glazed your eyes over with the hard math, it is easy to see that with one minor modification to your home, you can make major contributions towards water conservation with very little effort. Some water systems have set aside an amount in their annual budgets, varying from \$1000 to \$2000 per year, designated as subsidies towards low flush toilet refits for their stake-holders. This simple move can easily save the cost of drilling a new well in the long term.

If your water district has not looked at this conservation method, attend your AGM and ask that they consider designating some of your tax dollars for this project, and then support them in their efforts on your behalf.

Installation quotes we have received vary from the \$75.00 to \$80.00 range. Old toilets, always as clean as possible please, can be put through the crusher at our local recycling yard. The only request our hard working recycle folk have is that you break the toilet into a few pieces before taking it to their yard.

Remember that the vast majority of the island's septic systems are old, and their replacement means big bucks. Also remember that interfacing between the aquifers and septic fields has been noted. It is our responsibility to protect both to maintain our lifestyle and property values, and our aquifers. They are one issue---with two ends (if you pardon the pun).

Living rural and remaining independent requires some special effort. That's what gives the island and islanders real character.

Mary Cooper,
Chair, MIWSS