

## The Do's of Septic Care

- Consider attending a free 2 hour CRD Septic Savvy Workshop (see CRD contact information).
- Learn and record the location of your septic system, including tank and dispersal area.
- Have an Authorized Person (AP\*) develop a maintenance plan (see contact information). Allow easy access to the system for monitoring and maintenance. Keep a record of pumping, inspections and other maintenance.
- Install an effluent filter if you don't already have one. Special units are available for retrofitting to an existing tank. Solids will be kept out of your dispersal system, and your system will last longer.
- Have a maintenance plan / service contract for package treatment plants, and have an AP\* attend to repairs promptly.
- Arrange for an AP\* to do an inspection the next time you have your system pumped. An AP\* should inspect the entire system: tank, tees or baffles, effluent filter, distribution box, dispersal system and pump chamber (if applicable). An AP\* is separate from a pumper.
- Arrange for another inspection in two to five years and a pump-out according to existing bylaws or at a frequency appropriate to your own particular circumstances, as determined by the inspector.
- Practice water conservation. Limit the number of high water use activities done consecutively or at the same time. For example, spread out laundry washings over the week and avoid running the dishwasher at the same time. Also, use water sparingly when watering over or near your dispersal system.
- Use alternatives to toxic cleaners and chemicals. Harmful chemicals can kill the beneficial bacteria in your septic tank, causing you to have your tank pumped more often. Toxins can also be carried to your dispersal system and into watercourses or drinking wells.
- Be aware that human wastes from people on medication (eg. antibiotics) can affect the performance of your septic system and may require more frequent pumping of your tank. Leftover medications should be returned to your pharmacy.
- If you are considering an addition to your home, contact the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) office for advice on whether your septic system will need upgrading. VIHA and the Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC (ASTTBC) Consumer Information Line (see contact information) can answer septic system questions.

## The Don'ts of Septic Care

- Don't allow potential poisons to get into your dispersal system, including paint, solvents, antifreeze, fuels, oil, pesticides or herbicides. They upset the beneficial bacteria in your system and can leach into groundwater and cause serious health or environmental concerns. Use environmentally friendly alternatives where possible.
- Don't pour hazardous waste down the drain. Take hazardous wastes to hazardous waste disposal depots. Contact the CRD Hotline (see contact information) for more information.
- Don't discharge water softener backwash into a septic system.
- Don't use septic tank "starters" or similar products. They can do more harm than good. Allow the natural bacteria to work on their own.
- Don't use granular drain cleaners. Only a small amount can kill all of the beneficial bacteria in your system, leading to rapid build-up of solids or dispersal system clogs.
- Don't use a garburator to dispose of food waste and other solids. Your tank will fill up prematurely and require more frequent pumping.
- Don't park, drive, pave or put heavy objects or machinery over your dispersal system. This can compact the soil, crush pipes and keep air from getting into the ground - all of which can lead to system failure.
- Don't plant trees or shrubs in the dispersal system area. Their roots can damage or plug the dispersal system pipes. Grass is ideal.
- Don't allow roof drains, perimeter drains or surface water runoff from driveways and slopes to discharge into your tank or onto the dispersal system. Excessive water can flood the system and cause premature failure.
- Don't use your toilet or drains as a trash can. Cooking grease, fats, cigarette butts, disposable diapers, sanitary napkins, hair, plastics, lint, metal, rubber, coffee grounds, tea leaves and cat litter should all be kept out of your septic system.
- Don't pour hazardous waste down the drain. Take hazardous wastes to hazardous waste disposal depots. Contact the CRD Hotline (see contact information) for more information.
- Don't attempt repairs or alterations to your septic system yourself. Only an AP\* should work on your septic system (see contact information).

\*An Authorized Person (AP) is either a Registered Onsite Wastewater Practitioner (ROWP) or a Professional Engineer (P.Eng.)



## Care and Maintenance

Neglect or abuse of your septic system can cause it to fail. A failed system can:

- Cause a serious health threat to your family, neighbours and pets
- Pollute ditches, streams, lakes, the ocean or groundwater
- Be very expensive and difficult to repair

Signs of a failing septic system:

- Sewage surfacing over the dispersal system (especially after a heavy rainfall)
- Lush, green growth or soggy areas over the dispersal area
- Slow or backed up drains, toilets or sinks
- Sewage odours around the property

Common causes of septic system failure are:

- Lack of proper maintenance of the septic tank (or package treatment plant)
- Excessive water intrusion into the drainfield area
- Overloading or abuse of the system with solids or chemicals

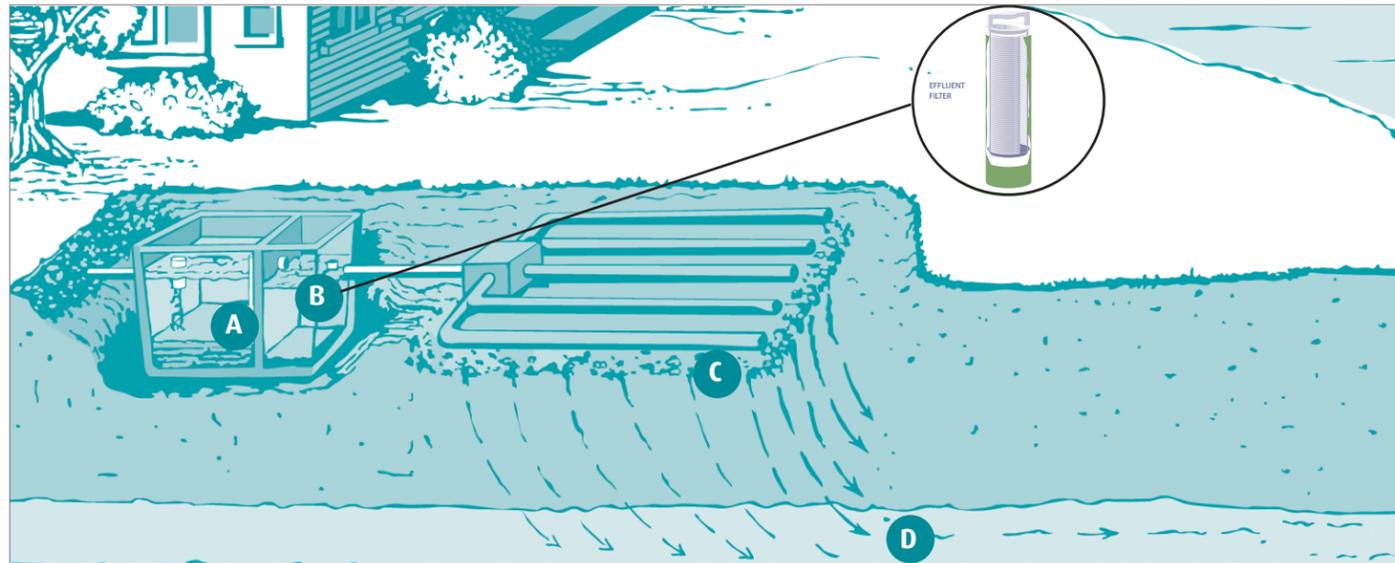


The key to a healthy, long lasting septic system is to protect the tank and dispersal area from becoming clogged with solids. Here's what you can do:

- Establish a maintenance plan with an AP\*
- Check your system annually to ensure that it's working properly
- Contact your maintenance provider immediately if the system is malfunctioning
- Have your septic tank pumped according to existing bylaws or at a frequency appropriate to your own particular circumstances, as determined by the inspector
- Ensure that your effluent filter is clean
- Conserve water
- Divert surface water away from your dispersal area, and keep harmful material out of the system



**Capital Regional District**  
625 Fisgard Street, Victoria, BC V8W 1R7  
T: 250.360.3030 | F: 250.360.3047  
[www.crd.bc.ca/septic](http://www.crd.bc.ca/septic)



## Septic Systems Explained

Properly functioning and maintained onsite septic systems are an excellent means of treating domestic wastewater. They are used for homes that are not connected to a public sewer line. Although many different types of systems are used, they generally operate under the same principles.

In a typical onsite septic system (Type 1), wastewater from sinks, tubs, showers and toilets flushes out of the house into a septic tank that separates and stores any solid particles that either settle to the bottom or float to the top. **A**

In the case of a package treatment plant type of system (Types 2 & 3), a tank called a “trash tank” may precede the treatment plant.

Beneficial bacteria help to break down the accumulated solids in these tanks, but eventually the solids build up and must be pumped out.

The partially treated wastewater then flows from the tank through an effluent filter **B** and into a distribution box (D-Box).

The D-Box evenly divides the discharge into a network of pipes that lie buried in drain rock in trenches in the dispersal system **C** (drainfield). Small holes in the pipes allow the wastewater to seep into the drain rock and then to the soil. Natural filtration and further bacterial action remove any remaining particles in the wastewater. When it finally reaches the water table, the wastewater has been treated and cleansed. **D**

When septic systems work properly, they are efficient, inexpensive to maintain and safe for people and the environment; if they fail, they can cause odours, water pollution, major repair costs and health hazards.

When wastewater doesn't get proper treatment, contaminants can leach into groundwater that supplies our wells or drain directly into our lakes, streams and backyards! Under the Public Health Act, the operation and use of your septic system is regulated by the B.C. Sewerage System Regulation. The owner/user of an onsite wastewater system (septic system) must ensure it is operated in accordance with the maintenance plan that is provided by the designer or planner of the system. The owner/user is required to keep records of the system maintenance. Only an Authorized Person (AP), specifically a Registered Onsite Wastewater Practitioner (ROWP) or Professional Engineer may work on septic systems (see contact information).

## Need more information?

### CRD Hotline

625 Fisgard Street  
Victoria, BC V8W 1R7  
Phone: 250.360.3030  
[www.crd.bc.ca/septic](http://www.crd.bc.ca/septic)

### Vancouver Island Health Authority

201 711 Vernon Avenue  
Victoria, BC V8X 5A7  
Phone: 250.519.3401  
<http://www.viha.ca/mho>

### Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of B.C.

(List of Professionals for Sewerage System Regulation)  
Phone: 1.888.430.8035  
[www.apeg.bc.ca/members/sewerageprolist.htm](http://www.apeg.bc.ca/members/sewerageprolist.htm)  
[apeginfo@apeg.bc.ca](mailto:apeginfo@apeg.bc.ca)

### Applied Science Technologists & Technicians of BC

Onsite Wastewater Registration Program  
(includes ROWP list)

10167 – 148th Street  
Surrey, BC V3R 0S4  
Consumer Information Line: 1.877.456.ROWP(7697)  
<http://owrp.asttbc.org>

### Ministry of Health Services

1515 Blanshard Street, 4th floor  
Victoria, BC V8W 3C8  
Phone: 250.952.1501  
<http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/protect/index.html>  
<http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile21.stm>



### Capital Regional District

625 Fisgard Street, Victoria, BC V8W 1R7  
T: 250.360.3030 | F: 250.360.3047  
[www.crd.bc.ca/septic](http://www.crd.bc.ca/septic)

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# Septic Savvy

CRD | Environmental Sustainability

## How to Care for Your Residential Septic System

