

Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group

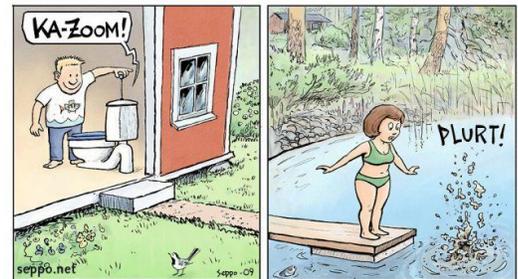
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Topic of the Month – February 2018

Managing a Healthy Septic System

As consumers it is sometimes easy to ignore our water usage and where it ends up. The purpose of an individual sewage treatment system is to recycle wastewater in a sustainable and cost-effective way, while protecting public health and the environment from harmful pathogens, nutrients, and chemicals. Currently in the United States, there are over 26 million septic systems recycling more than 5 billion gallons of effluent daily. Minnesota has approximately 500,000 septic systems and is increasing as properties develop.

Effective disposal and treatment of wastewater through a septic system does not end at the installation. Much like owning a car, good management is key to improving the performance and extending the life of the system. Lack of good management in most cases results in costly repairs or a replacement system. System management includes proper operation, maintenance, and monitoring.



A system can last a long time by following these common management tips:

- Conserve water usage, repair leaks, install low-flow fixtures and high efficiency appliances.
- Spread water usage throughout the day and laundry throughout the week to avoid overflowing the system.
- Do not dispose of: Grease, food, hair, plastics, feminine hygiene products, facial tissue, medications, hazardous waste, or “flushable” wipes through the system. **Only** human waste and toilet paper should be flushed.
- Limit the use of household cleaners such as bleach, detergents, Epsom salt, and antibacterial soap. **Do use** biodegradable liquid laundry and dishwashing detergent vs powder.
- Install a mesh lint filter on your washing machine hose.
- Divert water sources like downspouts, footing drains, and sump pumps away from the system.
- Do not use additives or cleaners in the septic tank.
- Have the septic tank pumped at least every three years or as specified by a licensed professional. Have baffles inspected at the time of pumping.
- Do not drive/park, dig, or build on top of the tank/drainfield.
- Do not plant deep rooted plants over the tank/drainfield. Maintain with grass or native flowers and mow at a minimum once a year. Do not water, burn or fertilize.
- Avoid freezing: Insulate the top of all system components with 8-12” of straw/leaves/hay, use warm water, and keep all animal and people traffic off, especially between the house and the tank.
- Follow the monitoring and maintenance plan provided with the system and keep record when it was serviced/maintained.

For information on your system contact your local government or a licensed septic professional.

Learn more at: <https://septic.umn.edu/> and <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/>

Information prepared by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and
the University of MN *Onsite Sewage Treatment Program*