

Onlot Septic System Maintenance

Signs of an onlot system in trouble include:

- Toilet runs sluggish.
- Sewer odors in the house and/or drinking water.
- Illness, often to household visitors.
- Sponginess around septic tank, distribution box or dosing tank and absorption area.
- Surfacing raw sewage.
- Dosing pump runs constantly or not at all.
- Dosing tank alarm light is on.
- Backup of sewage into laundry tubs or other fixtures.

Many of these signs indicate an onlot system malfunction.

Preventing Malfunctions

Homeowners can help prevent malfunctions and ensure the long-term use of their onlot system by doing the following:

- Conserving water and reducing waste flow into the septic tank.
- Having the septic tank pumped at least every 3-5 years, depending upon tank size and household size.
- Avoiding putting chemicals in the septic system.
- Not using the toilet to dispose of bulky, slowly decomposing wastes.
- Inspecting the septic tank, pipes and drainage field annually.
- Maintaining accurate records of the septic system (design, installation, location, inspections, pumpings, malfunctions, repairs.)
- Preventing run-off from downspouts, sump pumps, and paved surfaces from getting into the septic system.
- Keeping heavy vehicles, equipment and livestock away from the septic system.
- Not planting trees and shrubs over or close to the septic system.

Conserving Water and Reducing Wasteflow

Onlot systems not only treat and dispose of domestic sewage from toilets, they also receive wastewater from various other household fixtures, including baths, showers, kitchen sinks, garbage disposals, automatic dishwaters and laundries.

Conserving water and reducing the amount of wasteflow from household activities is an important step to ensuring long-term use. The more water-using devices in a household, the greater the burden is on the onlot system.

Following are some helpful water conservation tips and a comparison of water usage between conventional fixtures versus water-saving fixtures.

1. Use the dishwasher and laundry washer only when they are loaded to capacity.
 - Top Loading Laundry Washer 35-50 gal./load
 - **Front Loading Laundry Washer 22-25 gal./load**

2. Fix leaky faucets and plumbing fixtures quickly. Install flow control (regulator) devices on faucets.
 - Regular Faucet Aerator 2.5-6 gal./min.
 - **Flow regulating Aerator .5-2.5 gal./min.**
3. Take short showers instead of baths. Install flow control or water saving devices on showerheads and other plumbing fixtures.
 - Conventional Showerhead 3-15 gal./min.
 - **Water Saving Showerhead 2-3 gal./min.**
4. Reduce water use each time you flush the toilet. Put a heavy device such as a brick in a plastic bag or a water-filled plastic bottle in the reservoir or install a low flow toilet.
 - Conventional Toilet 4-6 gal./flush
 - **Water Saving Toilet 3-1.6 gal./flush**
5. Use the garbage disposal sparingly. These wastes place a greater burden on the septic system. If you have garden space, compost the material instead.

Pumping Your Septic Tank

A septic tank accumulates solids (sludge) and scum, which should be pumped out at least every three to five years. The frequency of pumping depends upon tank size and household size. Larger households generally require more frequent pumping (every one or two years).

In Pennsylvania, specific tank sizes are generally based on the number of bedrooms in the home because the number of bedrooms is an indicator of household size. For example, a home with three bedrooms must have a 900-gallon or larger septic tank. The more bedrooms, the larger the septic tank.

For more information on the recommended frequency of pumpings, contact your local Sewage Enforcement Officer or the Department of Environmental Protection.