

Septics Edition

First Flush, "tIssue" #4

Summer 2010

Septic System Myths — (great for a bedtime story!)

Years ago septic systems were thought of as a "temporary" solution for wastewater storage and disposal. The vision was that eventually sewer systems would be expanded and used for all development. Very little thought was given to extending the life of septic systems for long-term use. The philosophy was "bury it and forget it." Of course, the sewers never came and Grandpa's septic system lasted for years and years so why worry about yours? In this article we will talk about some of the myths related to how septic systems function, and why it is important that you maintain yours to lengthen its life.

Myth buster #1: "Grandpa's septic system never had any problems, why should mine?"

Many older septic systems only dealt with black water (toilet waste). Gray water (shower/sink/washing machine wastewater) was piped out to the back yard or neighboring stream or wetland. However, since the 1980s, gray water had to be combined with toilet water for proper treatment in the drainfield after studies showed that gray water has the same kind of harmful bacteria as toilet waste. Also, today we use more soaps and chemicals than they did in Grandpa's day, so our systems have to work much harder and can fail much sooner due to misuse.

The length of time a septic tank can be used before it needs pumping varies. It depends on how much stuff goes into them, for one thing. For instance, a person who lives alone may not need to pump their tank but every 10 years, whereas a family – husband, wife and some kids – may need their tank pumped every three years.

Myth buster #2: "I have never had to pump my tank and my system is working fine."

Two main functions of a septic system tank, the first component of your septic system, are (1) the storage of wastes and waste products, and (2) primary treatment through settlement of the solid waste material. The stuff you flush down the toilet does not magically disappear; it is stored in the tank and transforms into sludge, scum, and liquid. While the liquid moves into your drainfield, the rest builds up in the tank and will eventually need to be pumped out.

If you have lived in a home for over 5 years and never had your tank pumped, it is definitely time to at the very least have your system inspected. If the levels of toilet paper and levels of scum and sludge are too high (filling over a third of your tank capacity), there is a chance this solid material will "escape" the septic tank and plug up your drainfield plumbing as well as the soil pores surrounding it. By not checking the septic tank you are risking the health of your drainfield, which is the most expensive part of a septic system.

Did You Know?

A new County regulation that addresses septic system inspections at time of sale of property went into effect June 1st, 2010. The new regulation states a seller needs to have a current, professional "report of system status" (a septic system inspection) and share this report (and other information such as septic permits, etc.) with the property buyer.

Most financial institutions already require a professional inspection report when processing home loans. "Time



of Sale" septic system inspections must be conducted by either a licensed designer or a certified maintenance provider and system status report (previously known as "sanitary survey") submitted to Clallam County Environmental Health.

You can access the lists of designers and maintenance providers via the website at:

http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/onsite_professionals.html

Website Addresses for the Clallam County Onsite Program

Onsite septic systems in general:

<http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/onsite.html>

Past "Septics Edition" newsletters:

<http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/ehnewsletter1.html>

"Septics 101" class information:

http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/onsite_septic101.html



The Water Column

Stormwater Hits the Street!

Interested citizens are invited to attend meetings of the recently-formed Clallam County Stormwater Work Group. Clallam County Department of Community Development (DCD) created this stakeholder group to provide recommendations on stormwater management in the County to the Board of Commissioners. The County is committed to preparing a comprehensive stormwater plan and ordinances to address stormwater issues. The Work Group is discussing options for how to best manage stormwater and will consider new procedures that will undoubtedly place new burdens (and potential costs) on residents who seek to develop property as well as on County agencies responsible for protecting public safety and resources. County staff believe it is essential to approach these tasks with the input and wisdom of people who live and work in Clallam County, and welcome citizens to attend and provide input.

Work Group meetings are open to the public. There will be ten meetings held through March 2011; the schedule of meeting dates, times, and locations may be found on the Work Group website at: http://www.clallam.net/DCD/committee_Stormwater.html. For more information and/or to receive meeting notices by e-mail, contact DCD at 360-417-2416.

Dumping ANYTHING into a creek is illegal!



A Marine Recovery Area (MRA) is a management area established to protect especially sensitive marine waters from pollution. The MRA in eastern Clallam County was established because parts of Dungeness Bay are currently closed for commercial and recreational shellfish gathering, and there are bacterial pollution problems in some of the streams that empty into the Bay and the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Human waste, most likely from poorly functioning or failing septic systems, is contributing to these problems according to recent research that identified bacterial sources.

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Clallam County Environmental Health Services
223 E. 4th Street, Suite 14
Port Angeles, WA 98362



The address shown above is the taxing address on record in the Clallam County Assessor's Office for one or more properties that are (or are likely, according to land use information) utilizing an onsite septic system.



SUMMER CALENDAR

The Clean Water Herald is a periodic newsletter sponsored by members of the Clean Water Work Group, to inform and promote good stewardship of our shared natural resources.

The "**Septics Edition**" series will be published quarterly through 2011 by the helpful staff at Environmental Health Services, a division of the Clallam County Health & Human Services Department.

Contact us at the courthouse, 360-417-2258, or visit www.clallam.net/envhealth.

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Septics 101	Tuesday June 29 FULL 8:00 pm	County Courthouse Room 160
Septics 101	Future Classes will be announced as they are scheduled. Environmental Health is pursuing funding for <u>classroom</u> as well as <u>online</u> Septics 101 classes. Check our website for updates.	
Septics 201 (new name!) <u>Available</u> <u>in 2011</u>	Also known as Do It Yourself (DIY) Inspection training. Currently under development, this class will train the homeowner how to perform a certified inspection of their particular septic system.	

The reason the classes are split up is to shorten the amount of time spent in class or online during a particular day. Who wants to spend 8 or more hours on Saturday learning about septic?