

# Septics Edition

First Flush, "tIssue" #5

Fall 2010

## Caring for Your Septic System

Septic system care involves knowing where your system is, and how to use it. Your septic tank and drainfield function together, like a single living organism with beneficial bugs and microbes working to eliminate the nasty, disease-causing organisms in household wastewater. Here are some of Clallam County Environmental Health's favorite **Do's and Don'ts** for properly using your septic system.

### Lighten up!

Just as you would not subject your body to harsh chemicals (if you can help it), don't subject your septic system to chemicals either. Standard cleaning products won't hurt the tank if used in moderation, but non-toxic alternatives are best for the environment.



Powdered laundry detergent or liquid? The debate is ongoing regarding which one is best for septic systems. Our message is just to avoid using too much detergent; a little will still go a long way.

### Don't fill 'er up!

Don't use liquid fabric softener; it will fill your tank fast by fluffing up toilet paper and poop! A blue, fresh smelling tank is not normal!

Compost your food waste rather than using a garbage disposal, to avoid filling up your septic tank with fine food particles – most of which will not break down.



Throw pet waste (and kitty litter) into the trash, NOT your septic system. Pet waste is very different from human waste and will cause problems in your tank. Your pets' fecal matter has worms and different bugs that do not get broken down in the digestion process in the tank. Kitty litter is usually made with clay which will expand once it is in contact with water and plug up your pipes. Even if it says "flushable" kitty litter, just throw it and all pet waste into the trash.

### Good vs. bad

Go easy on bleach and antibacterial products. They kill the good bacteria as well as the bad.

If you or someone in your care is on chemotherapy or long-term antibiotics for several months, make sure the septic system is pumped out once treatment is completed. These kinds of drugs will kill the beneficial bacteria as well as the disease-causing bacteria in your tank, which can lead to septic system failure.

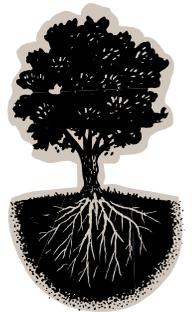


Beware of labeling! "Safe for septic tanks" on a label means that the product will not harm the concrete structure of your tank. This statement does not address whether the product will harm the living environment necessary for your septic system to work properly.

### Drip, drip, drip...

If you don't know yet, find out where your tank and drainfield are on your property. Don't drive, build a structure, or park a vehicle over your drainfield (or reserve area), as the soil can become compacted and not drain as it should.

Don't plant or let new trees or shrubs grow near your tank or drainfield, as young roots will seek the easiest path to water and find their way into your tank or completely fill up the pipes of your drainfield. Lawn or shallow-rooted groundcovers work well, but make sure they are mowed or pruned because the soil bacteria working under your drainfield need oxygen!



**Did You Know?** Most so-called "septic system additives" are NOT going to help your system function better. In fact, some additives can be harmful to your system. In 1993, the state Legislature found that "most additives do not have a positive effect on the operation of on-site systems, and can contaminate groundwater aquifers, render septic drainfields dysfunctional, and result in costly repairs to homeowners." It was the intent of the Legislature to ban the use, sale, and distribution of additives within the state unless an

additive has been specifically approved by Washington State Dept. of Health (DOH). Washington law now requires that manufacturers of any additive product receive approval before selling the product in our state. Approval does *not* mean the product works, just that it will do no harm. The list of DOH-approved additives can be found at:

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/WW/Additives.pdf>

Natural "additives" (eating, flushing, and so on...) work perfectly well!

### Clallam County Onsite Program & Other Stewardship Websites

- 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](http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/onsite_septic101.html)
- Water info and links: <http://www.clallam.net/features/water.html>
- Waste management: <http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/solidwaste.html>



## The Water Column

If you haven't already, you still can...



Let your lawn go brown

It's the new green.

Water is wealth  
It's time to save!



For information and links about water supply:

Water conservation:

<http://www.clallam.net/waterconservation/>

Climate change, rainfall, snowpack and predictions:

<http://cses.washington.edu/cig/res/hwr/hwrkeyfindings.shtml>

Watershed planning in Clallam County:

[http://www.clallam.net/Environment/html/watershed\\_planning.htm](http://www.clallam.net/Environment/html/watershed_planning.htm)

Dungeness instream flow Rule:

<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/instream-flows/dungeness.html>

### Clean Water Herald—Septics Edition Fall 2010

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

PRSR STD  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Olympic Mailing  
Services



Puget Sound  
Starts Here

The address used 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.



# FALL 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 friendly 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](http://www.clallam.net/envhealth).

Major funding for the **Septics Edition** is provided by the Centennial Clean Water Fund through a grant from Washington Department of Ecology.

Printed on 30% post-consumer content recycled paper.

Dungeness River Festival	Sept. 24-26	Railroad Bridge Park in Sequim	Look for the walk-through septic system at our booth on Friday and Saturday!
Septics 101	We are now developing an <b>online</b> version of this class, and online registration for in-person classes to be held this winter. The next "Septics Edition" newsletter in <u>early December</u> will announce details for both.		
Septics 201 (new name!) <i>Available in late 2011</i>	Also known as <b>Do-It-Yourself (DIY) inspection training</b> . Still under development, this class will train the homeowner how to perform a certified inspection of their particular septic system.		

*Septics 101 is general information for all septic system owners and users. It is encouraged for everyone but not required—unless a homeowner wants to take Septics 201, to become certified to inspect their system.*