

Septics Edition

First Flush, "tIssue" #9

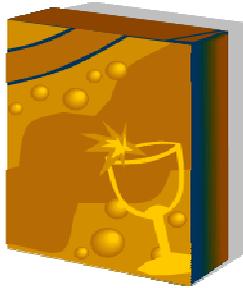
Fall 2011

Things to Know About Being on a Septic System

Think about your septic system as a living and breathing entity, much like your body. There is good and bad bacteria present in a system, so – just like your body – septic systems are very sensitive to what you put in them. This issue will give you valuable tips on how to take care of your system from *inside* your home.

'Safe for Septic' & 'Safe for Septic Tanks'

Have you seen this on the products you buy? In researching this disclaimer, we have found it is somewhat misleading. Product manufacturers can place this claim on their product when it has been found only to not hurt the concrete tank structure. It does not address what the product can do to the contents of the tank. A good rule of thumb is if you can't eat it and process it through your body, then use it in moderation!



Cleaning:

Of course, we have to clean house and do other household chores. Normal cleaning activities will not affect your system as long as you practice moderation in your use of cleaning products. You don't always need to use the manufacturer's amount to get things clean. Try using natural products for cleaning, like vinegar or baking soda.



Laundry:

Laundry detergent is often overused and this can wreak havoc on a septic system. You can tell if you are using too much by starting a load of laundry without detergent. If you are getting suds before adding any detergent then you are using too much. You can use half of the recommended amount and still get your clothes clean. Also, do not use liquid fabric softener if you are on a septic system—it just fluffs up everything in the tank and can cause the septic system to fail if too much is used. Avoid using



a lot of chlorine bleach because it can kill the good bacteria in the tank. Finally, spreading loads throughout the week will minimize impact on the system. Moderation is the key!

Toilet:

Do not put anything down the toilet except toilet paper and human waste. Hair, Q-tips, and wipes can get caught up in pipes and in the end you wind up pumping everything out anyway. Items advertised as "flushable" such as wipes, kitty litter, and diapers, might not clog pipes but they're not okay for your septic system. Avoid using bleach tablets, as this sends a constant supply of chlorine to the tank; again, this kills the good bacteria. Toilet paper should be non- quilted and two-ply. If toilet paper shreds too easily it will stay suspended in the tank and can clog your drainfield.



Dishwashers:

Dishwashers use a minimal amount of water and soap so there is little impact to a septic system. In fact, the hot water can be helpful in keeping pipes clear of clogging oils and grease.



More tips to come in the Winter tIssue... stay tuned!

HOPEFULLY, YOU SAW US AT THE COUNTY FAIR LAST MONTH... NEXT WE'LL BE AT THE DUNGENESS RIVER FESTIVAL SEPT. 23-24, 10AM-4PM, RAILROAD BRIDGE PARK. COME CHECK OUT THE NEW WALK-THRU SEPTIC TANK MODEL!

Did you know

...there are about 20,000 septic systems in Clallam County?! (We'd all know the exact number if everyone had a permit!)

Clallam County Onsite Program Websites

Onsite septic systems (OSS) in general:
Lists of OSS professionals in Clallam Co.:
To order a copy of an "as-built" drawing:

<http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/onsite.html>
http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/onsite_professionals.html
http://www.clallam.net/HHS/documents/asbuiltrequestno_fee.pdf



The Water Column

What Goes In Must Come Out... Drugs, both pharmaceutical and illicit, have probably been present in water and the environment for as long as humans have been using them. The drugs that we take are not entirely absorbed by our bodies, and are excreted and passed into wastewater. But then what?

Onsite septic systems are primarily designed to remove disease-causing bacteria and can only take care of some chemical contamination. Traces of caffeine, nicotine, pain relievers, hair products, insect repellent, hormones, medications, illicit drugs, household cleaners, and other chemicals have been found in septic effluent and underlying groundwater—some even locally, according to an Ecology study in Sequim in 2004.*

A new acronym is now used: PPCPs (see box). Fortunately, scientific research shows that groundwater concentrations of PPCPs diminish as you get further away from their source.

We continue to learn how effective septic systems are at treating pollution originating in our homes, but—like everything else—there are limits! NEVER flush unneeded medications down a toilet or drain, TAKE BACK prescription drugs to a pharmacy (check <http://www.takebackyourmeds.org>), and use NATURAL and biodegradable products for personal care and household cleaning as much as possible!

*Further information may be found at websites for U.S. Geological Survey, EPA, and WA Depts. of Ecology and Health.

Pharmaceuticals and Personal Care Products as Pollutants (PPCPs) refers, in general, to any product used by individuals for personal health or cosmetic reasons or used by agribusiness to enhance growth or health of livestock. PPCPs comprise a diverse collection of thousands of chemical substances, including prescription and over-the-counter therapeutic drugs, veterinary drugs, fragrances, and cosmetics. [EPA]

Clean Water Herald—Septics Edition Fall 2011

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223 E. 4th Street, Suite 14
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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.

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.

Septics 101 Online

Take the 30-minute video and quiz online at the link below, save and print your Certificate of Completion.

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

Septics 101 In-person classes

Wed., September 28 All classes held 6-8:00 pm at the
Wed., October 12 Dungeness River Audubon Center.
Wed., November 2 Please register at:

http://www.clallam.net/HHS/EnvironmentalHealth/onsite_septic101_registration.html

Septics 201 Planned release in early 2012

Also known as **Do-It-Yourself (DIY) inspection training**. Pilot test results are forthcoming. Soon the training will be available for any homeowner to perform a certified inspection of their septic system.