

TIP SHEET

Small Steps Toward Better Living

SEWAGE

Alternative System Maintenance

Proper septic system maintenance is essential in helping ensure that the system continues to treat wastewater and to be in line with Virginia regulations. Otherwise you may face replacing the system, which can be very costly. Follow these rules to care for your system.

Protect the alternative septic system from damage.

- Don't place anything other than grasses and wetland plants on the alternative septic system.
- No driving, or building in any shape or form on top of the alternative septic system.
- Keep trees at least 100 feet away from the alternative septic system to reduce damage from roots.

Perform regular maintenance.

- Have a qualified operator inspect and maintain the alternative septic system at least once a year if not twice a year.
 - It is a Virginia state requirement that every alternative septic system must be inspected annually.
- Have a qualified professional pump out your alternative septic system every 3-5 years.

Divert rainwater and runoff from the alternative septic system.

- A soggy alternative septic system won't absorb and adequately treat wastewater. Grade the yard to drain water away from the alternative septic system and direct roof gutters and basement drains away from the system. Check our Stormwater Recipes.

Don't overload the alternative septic system.

- Check faucets and toilets for leaks and repair when necessary.
- Use aerators on faucets and flow reducer nozzles on showers to lower water use.
- Reduce water levels for small loads of laundry or wash only full loads.
- Try to spread laundry chores over the week rather than all on one day.
- Wait until the dishwasher is full before you run it.
- Use low-flow appliances to reduce water use.

The toilet isn't a garbage can.

- Never flush down the toilet any kitty litter, disposable diapers, sanitary napkins, tampons, condoms, paper towels, facial tissues, cigarette butts, coffee grounds or filters, plastics, dental floss or any product that will not readily break down.

If a garbage disposal is necessary, use it sparingly.

- Limit washing food scraps, coffee grounds or similar materials down the drain.
- Do not pour grease down the drain. If grease reaches the absorption area it can clog the system.

Use cleansers in moderation and keep toxic or hazardous chemicals out of the system.

- Exclude anti-freeze, gasoline, paints, varnishes, paint thinners, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, photographic chemicals, oils, and waste oils.
- Most septic system additives are at the least ineffectual and in some cases can damage the septic system.
- The overuse of cleansers such as bleaches, disinfectants, anti-bacterial soaps, drain cleaners and toilet bowl cleaners can impact the number of bacteria in the system that are needed to treat the wastewater.

