

Resources

For information about inspections:

Dane County Environmental Health
2701 International Lane, Suite 204
Madison, WI
608-242-6515

Also, here are some websites that you
may find helpful:

Environmental Protection Agency

http://www.epa.gov/owm/septic/pubs/homeowner_guide_long.pdf

National Environmental Services Center

http://www.nesc.wvu.edu/pdf/ww/septic/pl_fall04.pdf

These are just a sampling of what is
available on the web. Feel free to
explore these sites or call a septic
service provider if your questions
haven't been answered.

Inspection:

Dane County Environmental Health governs Town of Middleton septic systems. Every third year the system is required to be pumped and inspected. A postcard is mailed to the property owner who is responsible for contacting a qualified septic servicer, having them inspect their system and pump it out.

The cost of the Dane County Fee is included on property taxes – with one third of the fee charged annually.

WARNING

NEVER enter a septic tank. The septic tank produces gases which can kill a person in a matter of minutes. Never go into a septic tank to retrieve someone. Call for emergency services and put a fan at the top of the tank to blow in fresh air.

Information in this pamphlet was sourced from Wisconsin Onsite Waste Disposal Association.

Septic System FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions about Septic Systems:

Should I add anything to my septic system?

Biological and chemical additives are not needed to aid or accelerate decomposition. At this time there is no conclusive data to support the effectiveness of enzymes or any chemical treatment to rejuvenate a failing drain field. These products are approved by the State of Wisconsin only because they do not harm the septic system.

How often should I have my septic tank pumped?

The frequency of pumping depends on several factors: tank size, usage, volume of solids in wastewater. A tank requires pumping when it is 1/3 full of scum and sludge. A good pumping interval is every 1 to 3 years.

What are the warning signs of a failing septic system?

These signs may be indicators that the drain field is failing:

- Any plumbing back-ups.
- Grass in the yard growing faster and greener in the area of the drain field or tank(s).
- Soft or mushy ground in the area of the drain field
- Constant sewage odors.
- Sluggish toilet flushing
- Septic pump runs constantly
- Solids accumulating in the drain field vent or observation tubes.

Can garbage disposals be used with septic systems?

Yes, but try to avoid allowing grease or slowly biodegradable products such as coffee fruit and vegetable peelings and bones to get into the disposal.

Can I plant trees or shrubs over my drain field?

Generally no. Many tree species have roots that will attempt to grow into the drain field to seek out moisture and nutrients. These may break drain field or sewer lines, or disrupt the distribution of effluent. There are some trees that are safe to plant over or near drain fields. Your local landscape contractor or garden center is a good source of information.

What if liquid is observed in the drain field vent or observation tubes?

Liquid observed in the drain field usually indicates that the soil absorption capability of the drain field is reduced, and ponding is progressing. The ponding state of a drain field is usually a slowly developing condition. The estimated life of today's drain fields under normal usage is 15 to 25 years.

Can I use my old drain field later once a new one is installed?

In most cases, yes. If the old drain field was sized appropriately to its current use and the soil below has been shown to have at least 3 feet of suitable soil, then the owner will be able to switch between the two drain fields by means of a diverter valve. Once a replacement drain field is installed, the original drain field will be allowed to rest and rejuvenate. Switching may occur every 1 to 5 years.

Which laundry detergents are best for a septic system?

Laundry detergents contain emulsifiers; some brands more than others. An emulsifier suspends fats, greases and oils in water for a time – usually the time it takes to pass out of the septic tank. These compounds may congeal in the sewer lines and drain fields over time. It's always best to not overuse any detergent.

Avoid detergents containing phosphates to protect the groundwater.

What can I do to prolong the life of my drain field?

The following suggestions represent best practices.

- Install water saving devices and be on-guard for leaky fixtures.
- Have tank(s) pumped and inspected regularly.
- Keep surface water away from the septic system.
- Keep driveways, parked vehicles and buildings off the drain field area.
- Install a second septic tank to further reduce solids from entering the drain field.
- Understand what can and cannot be put into the septic tank.