



St. Joseph County Health Department

“Promoting physical and mental health and facilitating the prevention of disease, injury, and disability for all St. Joseph County residents”

WOULD IT BE O.K. WITH YOU IF WE SAVED YOU \$5,000 TO \$10,000?

Many people that move to our community have never owned a septic system and are completely unfamiliar with how they work and how easy it is to ruin them. You can easily manage your system or pay the high price to replace it. If you do not receive a monthly bill from a city sewer company you have a septic system.

The septic system in your yard is sewage treatment plant. It is designed to let bacteria treat your wastewater and make it clean before it enters the groundwater. You must manage your system or it will fail. If you follow these recommendations you will greatly reduce the potential for your system to fail and avoid the thousands of dollars that it would cost to replace it.

- Know where your septic tank and septic field are located in your yard. If you don't know, contact the Health Department to get a copy of our records.
- Don't let a plumbing problem ruin your system. A toilet that leaks or faucet that runs can overload your system.
- Do not connect the sump pump in your basement to the septic system - it will overload and ruin your system - not to mention it a violation of State and County law. If it is connected, call a plumber. The clothes washer must be connected to septic system, not the sump pump. You can discharge the sump water onto the ground.
- Do not put the following down the drain:
 - Fats, oils, or greases. This is one of the major causes of failures. Put these in the trash.
 - Paint, petroleum or other hazardous materials. The Solid Waste Management District will take these for free.
 - Unused medicine of any kind. Put these in the trash.
- Do not put **anything** in the toilet but human waste and toilet paper.
- Have your tank pumped.
 - If only two people live in the home it should be pumped every five years.
 - If six people live in the home it should be pumped every other year.
 - If you use your garbage disposal heavily have the tank pumped twice as often.
 - Look under “Septic” in the yellow pages for a pumper.
- Don't build anything (such as a sidewalk or garage) over your septic tank or field. You will not be able to repair the tank and the field system will be deprived of oxygen that the bacteria need to break down the contaminants. Don't drive on your system either.
- Don't plant trees near your system; they will clog the pipes and the field system.
- Don't overuse your system by running the clothes washer many times in a single day. Spread out the loads. The system needs to recover after it is heavily used.

Remember, it is you responsibility to manage your septic system and if it fails, the Health Department will require that you to replace the system. This will be costly. The Health Department can provide you with much more useful information. Please call (574) 235-9723 for more information or to speak with an Environmental Health Specialist.

How a Typical Septic System Works

- All of your wastewater flows through pipes into a concrete tank in the yard. There should be a one-foot diameter vertical plastic pipe in your yard that allows access to the tank.
- Bacteria in the tank begin to break down the waste. Solids drop to the bottom and scum (fats, oils and greases) float at the top.
- The liquid between the solids and the scum flows through a distribution box that allows the same amount of liquid to go to each of the

REMEMBER THAT WHAT YOU PUT IN YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM EVENTUALLY GOES INTO THE GROUNDWATER WHICH IS WHERE YOU GET YOUR DRINKING WATER.