

Maintaining Your Septic System - A Guide for Homeowners

**Vigo County Health
Department
Environmental Health
Division**

What You Don't Know Can Hurt You and Your Bank Account !!!

Did you know that as a homeowner **you're responsible** for maintaining your septic system?

The consequences of forgetting or ignoring this responsibility can be **very expensive**.

After purchasing a new or existing home, most homeowners probably do not expect to pay several thousand dollars in repair costs to provide approved on-site waste disposal.

However, septic system neglect can result in **septic system failure**.



Homeowners with Surfacing Sewage



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Why Maintain Your Septic System ?

There are two main reasons why septic system maintenance should be important to you as a homeowner.

The first reason is **money!!** Failing septic systems are expensive to repair and/or replace. Poor maintenance practices on the homeowners part are a common cause of early system failures.

The second reason is to protect the **health** of your family and your community! A septic system which fails may release inade-

quately treated household waste into the environment. This seepage might occur in areas where your children or pets play or into streams or drainage ways to be carried onto neighboring properties.

Contact with untreated human waste is a health risk. Untreated wastewater emanating from a failed system can contaminate nearby wells, ponds or streams.

How Does Your Conventional Septic System Work ?

A conventional septic system consists of -

- a drain pipe
- a septic tank
- a distribution box
- an absorption field
- and often, in soils with wetness characteristics, a subsurface perimeter drain tile
- the soil

All household generated wastewater flows into the septic tank through drain piping exiting the home.

The septic tank holds wastewater , allowing solids to settle to the tank bottom and greases/fats to float to the top of the tank.

An outlet baffle in the tank prevents solids and greases/fats from flowing out of the tank and possibly plugging the remainder of the system or the soil surrounding the absorption field.

The distribution box receives pretreated wastewater and distributes it evenly to each absorption field trench.

Final treatment of the wastewater occurs in the soil.



Septic System Do's and Don'ts

Do's

- **Do** learn the location of your septic system and keep a sketch in your maintenance records.

- **Do** have your septic tank pumped and inspected by a licensed contractor every 3 to 5 years. The tank outlet baffle must be intact and functioning properly.

- **Do** minimize excess water usage in and around the home. Check for water leaks in the home and repair to eliminate. Check for ponding rain water or surface runoff at the septic system drain field. If necessary, redirect surface water away from the absorption field.

- **Do** minimize garbage disposal use. Compost or throw food waste in the garbage. Garbage disposal discharge into the septic tank will only accelerate solids and grease/fats accumulation in the tank resulting in the necessity to pump the tank more frequently than the recommended 3 to 5 years.

- **Do** call a professional when experiencing problems with your septic system.

Don'ts

- **Don't** dispose of the following into your septic system.....

- medical products
- greases/fats/oils
- feminine products
- paints, thinners or solvents

- **Don't** plant trees around the septic system, especially near or over the absorption field.

- **Don't** allow vehicular traffic or construction activity across or on the septic system. This can cause compaction of the ground and greatly affect bacterial effectiveness in the soil.

- **Don't** build any type structure, including fence posts, over or through the septic system.

- **Don't** use septic tank additives.

- **Don't** make or allow repairs to your septic system without Vigo Co. Health Dept. input and approval.

- **Don't** plug or destroy the discharge outlet of a subsurface perimeter drain tile.

- **Don't** discharge water from roof drains, floor drains, A/C discharge lines or sump pumps into a septic system or soil absorption field perimeter drain tile.

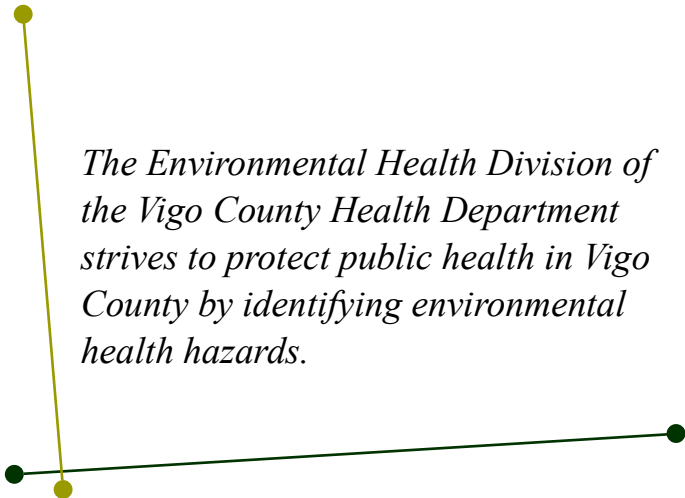
Summary -

In summary, do not dispose of items that will destroy the natural digestion process of your septic tank, or overtax the drain field with excessive water. If you adhere to these few simple Do's and Don'ts, your septic system will prove to be a safe and economical onsite method for disposing of your home wastewater.

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Visit Our Website -
www.vigocounty.org/health/environmental



The Environmental Health Division of the Vigo County Health Department strives to protect public health in Vigo County by identifying environmental health hazards.

Homeowners Septic System Checklist

Septic System Description -
(Contact the Vigo County Health Department to inquire about available information)

Date System Installed _____

Installer _____

(Contact the Vigo County Health Department to inquire about available information)

Date System Installed _____

Installer

Tank Size (gal) _____

Absorption Field Size (sq ft) _____

Subsurface Drain Tile (yes/no) _____

Drain Outlet Location _____

Septic Diagram (yes/no) _____

Septic System Maintenance Record

[illegible]