



IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR OWNERS OF SEPTIC AND ONSITE TREATMENT SYSTEMS

Items to Avoid

The following guidance is a collaborative effort of wastewater professionals within the National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association (NOWRA). The purpose is to identify common issues that can cause problems with the operations of newer onsite treatment and traditional septic systems. Many operational problems exist today because owners are unaware of the results of daily practices to these systems. NOWRA's goal is to ensure that owners are educated and informed about the safe practices for their treatment systems in order to avoid costly repairs and to protect groundwater quality. The items listed below are known to have caused failures of septic and onsite treatment systems and must be considered if waste generated by/from a particular site will contain them in excessive quantities. This means that tanks must be pumped more frequently and drainfields may fail - both of which are very expensive to correct. Since excessive is a subjective word, it is highly recommended by NOWRA that you share any concerns with a Wastewater Professional to come up with a treatment strategy for your particular needs. *(A listing of NOWRA's professional service providers is found on www.nowra.org)*

INERT MATERIALS - Plastic, rubber, scouring pads, dental floss, kitty litter, cigarette filters, bandages, hair, mop strings, lint, rags, cloth and towels do not degrade in an onsite treatment system. Inert materials build up solids and lead to system malfunction, clogging or increased pump-out frequency.

PAPER PRODUCTS - Disposable diapers, paper towels, facial tissues, baby wipes, lotioned, scented or quilted toilet tissue, and moist toilet paper do not dissolve readily in an onsite treatment system. Also, excessive amounts of toilet tissue do not easily decompose, and can lead to system malfunctions, back-up or increased pump-out frequency.

FOOD WASTES - Do not put animal fats & bones, grease, coffee grounds, citrus & melon rinds, corn cobs, or egg shells down the sink. Garbage disposal use should be limited to waste that cannot be scooped out and thrown in the trash. Spoiled dairy products and yeasts from home brewery or baking may cause excessive growth of microbes that do not degrade sewage.

HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS - Do not flush female sanitary products, cotton balls or swabs, or condoms into the system. Antimicrobial soaps and automatic disinfection tablets (blue, clear or otherwise) may kill the organisms needed to consume waste.

MEDICATIONS/AILMENTS - Normal use of over-the-counter medications will not affect the performance of onsite systems; however, do not flush expired medicines/antibiotics into an onsite treatment system. Some prescription medications are known to cause biological disruption. Diseases or conditions which can affect septic system function include bulimia, several infections (including AIDS), chronic diarrhea, intentional/colon by-pass, or other gastrointestinal conditions and cancer. Oral or intravenous chemotherapy is known to cause severe disruption to the treatment process and require more frequent pump-out intervals or the use of biologically based additives.

COMMERCIAL ADDITIVES - Both the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Small Flows Clearing House report that there is no evidence to support the use of additives with normally functioning onsite treatment systems. Some septic tank additives have been shown to do more harm than good. A normally functioning system should not require additives.





CHEMICALS & TOXINS - The following materials kill the microbes necessary for the biological treatment to occur: paint, paint thinner, solvents, volatile substances, drain cleaners, automotive fluids, fuels, pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, metals, disinfectants, sanitizers, bleach, mop water, floor stripping wastes, excessive use of household chemicals, and backwash from water softener regeneration.

LAUNDRY PRACTICES - Because onsite systems process water as it enters the system, laundry should be spread out over the week and not run all at one time. Excessive use of detergents, especially those containing bleach, can affect system performance. Liquid detergents are recommended over powders. Fabric softener

sheets are recommended over liquid softeners. Bleach should be used sparingly and at half the rate indicated on the container.

CLEAR WATER WASTE - Excessive flows from A/C discharge lines, floor drains, gutters, whole house water treatment systems and sump pumps can increase the flow to your treatment system. These flows can at least disrupt, if not destroy, your treatment process.

Remember - if you have additional questions, consult your wastewater professional. NOWRA has a new online service available at www.nowra.org to help you with these issues.

