

Understanding septic....

(Continued from page 1)

900 and 1,500 gallons of water. The drainage field, also called a leach field, disposal field, or soil absorption field, is a series of trenches filled with gravel.

When water is used in the house (flushing a toilet, taking a shower, using the washing machine), it goes through the pipes in the house to an inlet in the septic tank. There, the heavier solids settle on the bottom as sludge, and the oils, fats, and grease, which are lighter than water, rise to the top and form a scum layer.

The middle layer of water/effluent flows from the septic tank's outlet valve to the drainage field. A perforated pipe distributes the wastewater throughout the trenches of the drainage field where it leaches into the gravel. The gravel and soil filter the water as it works its way through the soil to the groundwater.

If your septic system is not functioning properly, wastewater can back up into your home from the septic tank, or leach onto the surface of your property. Untreated wastewater can pose significant health risks, including contaminating water sources.

Natural bacteria break down some of the waste that remains in the septic tank. Any waste that does not break down remains in the tank until it is pumped out. To keep a septic system performing, the septic tank should be pumped out at least every three years to remove the waste from the tank.

Warning signs of a failing septic system are slow draining sinks and toilets, gurgling sounds in the plumbing, sewage odors in the house or yard, wet or mushy ground over the drainage field, and plumbing backups.

For detailed information, the 19-page "On-Lot Sewage System Owner's Manual" can be downloaded from the Chester County Health Department's website at www.chesco.org/health. Click on A-Z Topics and "On-Lot Septic Systems."

The Township and County's role in sewage safety

Proper sewage disposal is a public health issue; as such, the Chester County Health Department approves, inspects, issues permits, and monitors all wastewater disposal in the county, including individual septic systems. If a private homeowner's system is failing, the County will require that the system be replaced (at the owner's expense) if normal maintenance fails to solve the problem.

The Township, as part of the state mandated Act 537 Plan (management of sewage in the township), must have ordinances requiring residents to pump septic systems. Franklin Township's Act 537 Plan is awaiting approval from the Pennsylvania Department of

Environmental Protection and once approved, it will be adopted by the supervisors. In this plan, septic systems are required to be pumped every three years.

All septic system contractors that are licensed in Chester County must submit to the County septic system pumping records, which are stored in a database. Currently, about 40 percent of all Franklin Township septic systems are listed with the County as having been pumped in the past three years.

If you haven't pumped your septic system within the last three years, make plans to do so now. It is best for the septic system and the environment, and soon it will be mandatory.

Tips for good septic system management

1. Have your septic tank pumped at least every three years.
2. Conserve water in the following ways:
 - Fix leaking faucets and toilets
 - Install water-saving faucets, showerheads, and toilets
 - Take showers instead of baths
3. Do not dispose the following items into your septic system:
 - Grease, oil, fat
 - Bones, eggshells, coffee grounds
 - Feminine hygiene products
 - Disposable diapers
 - Dental floss, cigarette butts
 - Paints and paint thinners
 - Pesticides
 - Kitty litter
 - Photographic solutions
4. Spread high water use activities, such as clothes washing, over an entire week.
5. Do not use harsh drain cleaners or toilet tablets containing chlorine.
6. Keep automobiles and heavy equipment off the drainage field and septic tank.
7. Divert surface water runoff away from drainage field and tank.
8. Use of a garbage disposal can add solid waste to the system and clog the drainage field.
9. Use or install a watertight concrete riser over the septic tank for easy access. Do not pump through the inspection port.
10. Do not plant trees or shrubs over the drainage field. The roots can get into the lines and limit the effectiveness of the whole system.
11. Do not use septic tank cleaners and additives. It can hurt the bacterial balance in your system.

Franklin Township wins first place: most improved newsletter

Franklin Township's newsletter was awarded first place in the "Most Improved" category of the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors' (PSATS) 39th Annual Citizen Communications Contest.

Newsletters entered from across the state were judged on the usefulness of the information presented, how the information was communicated, the overall attractiveness of the publication, and its readability.

PSATS represents the 1,456 townships

of the second class (townships under 10,000 in population), the largest political subdivision in the commonwealth.

Congratulations to everyone that contributed to making our newsletter among the best in the entire state of Pennsylvania.