



*Calaveras County*  
*Environmental Management Agency*  
*Onsite Wastewater Department*

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***Care of Your Onsite Wastewater Treatment System***

Since the septic tank is such an essential part of your onsite wastewater treatment system (OWTS), here are some points to remember about the “Care & Feeding” of your system:

- With ordinary use and care, a septic tank usually requires pumping out every 3 to 5 years.
- A “starter” is not needed for bacterial action to begin in a septic tank. Many bacteria are present in the materials deposited into the tank and will thrive under the growth conditions present.
- If you feel that an additive is needed, be aware that some may do great harm. Additives that advertise to “eliminate” tank cleaning may cause the sludge layer to fluff up and be washed out into the drain field, plugging soil pores.
- Send all wastewater into the septic tank. Don’t run laundry wastes directly into the drain field, since soap or detergent scum will plug the soil pores, causing failure.
- Normal amounts of household detergents, bleaches, drain cleaners and other household chemicals can be used and won’t stop the bacterial action in the septic tank. But don’t use excessive amounts of any household chemicals. Do not dump cleaning water from latex paint brushes and cans into the house sewer.
- Don’t deposit coffee grounds, cooking fats, disposable diapers, facial tissues, wet wipes, feminine products, cigarette butts and other non-decomposable materials into the house sewer. These materials will not decompose.
- If you must use a garbage disposal, you will likely need to remove septic tank solids more often than 3 to 5 years. It is better to compost, incinerate, or deposit the materials in the garbage that will be hauled away.
- Avoid dumping grease down the drain. It may plug sewer pipes or build up in the septic tank and plug the inlet. Keep a separate container for waste grease and throw it out with the garbage.

- Use tissue that breaks up easily when wet. One way to find out is to put a hand full of toilet tissue in a fruit jar half full of water. Shake the jar and if the tissue breaks up easily, the product is suitable for the septic tank.
- To properly clean a septic tank, both man hole lids or the tank cover must be removed. This is the only way to be sure that all the solids have been pumped out of both compartments of the tank.
- Using too much soap or detergent can cause problems with the wastewater treatment system. It's generally best not to use inexpensive detergents which may contain excessive amounts of filler or carrier. Some of these fillers are montmorillonite clay, which is used to seal soils. The best solution may be to use a liquid laundry detergent, since they are less likely to have carriers or fillers that may harm system.
- Each wastewater treatment system has a certain capacity. When this capacity is reached or exceeded, there will likely be problems because the system won't take as much wastewater as you want to discharge into it. When the system reaches its daily capacity, be conservative with your use of water. Each gallon of water that flows into the drain must go through the septic tank and into the soil absorption unit. Here are some tips: Routinely check the float valve on all toilets to be sure it isn't sticking and the water isn't running continuously. It doesn't take long for water from a leaking toilet or a faucet to add up. A cup of water leaking out of a toilet every minute doesn't seem like much but that's 90 gallons a day.
- The most effective way to reduce the wastewater flow from a house is to reduce the toilet wastes which usually account for about 40 percent of the flow by installing low flow toilets.
- Front loading washers and suds savers use less water than top loading machines. If your wastewater treatment system is reaching its maximum capacity, try to spread out the laundry during the week to avoid overloading the system.

