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Take Care of Your Septic System

Did you know that one-quarter of all U.S. homes have septic systems? Is yours one of them? If you live outside of city limits, use well water, or your neighbors have septic systems, then you most likely do too. This means that everything that goes down the drain of your sink, shower, and washing machine, or that is flushed down the toilet stays on your property and is treated underground by your septic system through a combination of technology and nature. Depending on your system type, the treated water either soaks into the ground or is sprayed on the surface. Now imagine if your septic system isn't working properly causing untreated wastewater to soak into your yard...not a pretty picture!

Properly maintaining your septic system not only keeps disease-carrying wastewater away from your family and pets, but also safeguards drinking water sources and keeps pollution out of groundwater and surface water. Proper maintenance maximizes the lifespan of your system and saves you money by preventing costly repairs or replacement. Knowing how your system works and quickly recognizing issues will help keep you and the environment healthy and save you money.

To prevent problems, inspect your septic system regularly and look for these signs of system failure: slowly draining sinks or toilets, gurgling sounds of backups in the plumbing, sewage odors, areas in the yard that remain wet and spongy during dry times, and patches of excessive grass or plant growth. If you notice any of these signs, schedule an inspection with a licensed professional. Or better yet, help your septic system stay in good working order by conserving water and fixing leaks to avoid overloading the system, using the garbage disposal sparingly, diverting water sources, like roof drains, away from the system, and not using your toilet as a trash can.

Luckily there are numerous resources available to help you understand and care for your septic system. The Texas AgriLife Extension Service website (ossf.tamu.edu) provides detailed explanations about how conventional and aerobic systems work. Also, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Septic Smart website (water.epa.gov/infrastructure/septic) contains resources for homeowners, government officials, and industry professionals to spread public awareness about the importance of maintaining onsite wastewater treatment systems. Locally, the Kerr County Environmental Health Department is responsible for ensuring septic systems are installed and operating according to state law. The department is also an excellent resource for questions about your system or for a list of licensed professionals (830-896-9020). Also, UGRA compiled print materials for homeowners and businesses about the “Do’s and Don’ts of Septic Systems.” The handouts and magnets are available at the UGRA office to any interested citizens and can also be viewed on the UGRA webpage (ugra.org/major-initiatives/bacteria-reduction-plan). Remember, “Take care of your septic system and it will take care of you!”

Let’s Keep Our River Clean

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