

## Maintenance of Your Septic System

Most rural homes and cottages use a septic system - a sewage system that usually consists of a tank and a leaching bed, also sometimes called a tile bed. A septic system is privately owned, and by law you are responsible for its safe operation, maintenance and repair.

A septic system is like any other equipment in your house. If you operate and maintain the system responsibly, it will work well and should last a long time. A properly functioning septic system provides a safe, reliable way of treating your household wastewater.

If you don't maintain your septic system, you could be endangering your family's health, the integrity of the natural environment and nearby water sources. If something goes wrong with your septic system, the replacement cost can be up to \$25,000.

The Province of Ontario is committed to ensuring that Ontarians can enjoy safe and clean water for generations to come. The Province has taken steps such as the passing of the *Clean Water Act, 2006* and making changes to the *Building Code Act, 1992* to better ensure that septic systems in Ontario are well maintained to help protect the quality of water.

This pamphlet contains tips on how to responsibly operate and maintain your septic system, when to have your system inspected and how to tell if your system is not functioning properly.

## Safe Operation of Your Septic System

Here are some things you can do to responsibly operate and maintain your septic system:

- know the location of your tank and bed and have the tank contents pumped out when necessary (generally every 3 to 5 years).
- avoid putting food, compost or grease down the drain.
- conserve water and try to spread water use over the course of the week – including laundry.
- avoid excessive use of anti-bacterial soaps, bleaches and harsh cleaning products.
- protect your sewage system – avoid driving over it and do not construct anything (e.g. pools, driveways and sheds) on or near any part of the tank or bed.
- avoid putting paints, solvents, pesticides and other toxic chemicals in your system; use recycling or hazardous waste collection programs for these substances.
- keep trees and shrubs away from the leaching bed.
- a properly installed and maintained septic system should avoid contamination of nearby wells. A private well should be tested for bacteria at least 3 times per year.

## Septic System Inspections

Regular inspections are important for the proper maintenance of your sewage system and can identify on-going or potential problems. Inspections can help to ensure a long, useful lifespan for your sewage system.

### New or Replacement Septic Systems

- new and replacement septic systems require a building permit and must be approved and inspected by the local enforcement agency to ensure that it meets the requirements of the Building Code.
- your municipality can tell you who enforces septic system requirements in your area.

### Time of Sale Inspections

- buyers, real estate agents and financial institutions commonly request that septic systems be inspected prior to finalizing a sale to protect against unexpected costs.
- a time of sale inspection might involve pumping the tank and examining the leaching bed for any signs of problems.
- this type of inspection may be conducted by a licensed septic system installer, a licensed sewage hauler or a professional engineer.

### Re-inspection Programs

- some municipalities have initiated re-inspection programs of existing septic systems to address water quality concerns.
- these programs are conducted by the local enforcement agency to determine the integrity of the system.
- this type of inspection could involve assessing the condition of the tank, as well as examining the bed for signs of problems.