

HOME SEWAGE DISPOSAL

WHAT THE HOMEOWNER
MUST KNOW ABOUT
ON-SITE SEWAGE (WASTEWATER)
DISPOSAL

INTRODUCTION

In many areas of Michigan, the on-site wastewater disposal system, commonly known as the septic tank system, is relied upon to safely dispose of household sewage. The homeowner who understands this system and its proper care and use will improve the chances of the system providing him with many years of trouble-free service. Misuse or neglect may cause premature problems and unnecessary expense.

WHY THE CONCERN?

A failing disposal system where wastewater is pooling in the yard or backing up in the house is a health hazard and increases the potential for disease transmission. In addition, a failing system quickly becomes a neighborhood nuisance and can contaminate surface waters.

WHAT IS IT?

A private sewage disposal system normally consists of two basic parts - a watertight septic tank for receiving the untreated household waste and a subsurface soil absorption area to dispose of the wastewater. The septic tank allows the heavy solids to settle out and decompose slowly by bacterial action. The liquid from the septic tank is then distributed underground through a series of perforated pipes surrounded by stone to allow distribution of the liquid into the soil.

FACTORS DETERMINING DESIGN

The installation must be designed to accept the anticipated wastewater flows from a dwelling. Among concerns are replacement area, the soil types found on the property, seasonally high groundwater table, and isolation

distances from water supplies, lakes and streams. Land with heavy clay soils, seasonally high water tables, flooding conditions, poor drainage, or steep slopes limit the suitability of a site for wastewater disposal.

Minimum design criteria is a part of local regulation enforced by your health department. It is sometimes necessary to exceed the minimum sizing requirements to assure adequate sewage disposal. Some land areas have such severe limitations that they are not suitable for use with an on-site sewage disposal system.

WATER

The design of the individual sewage disposal system is based upon anticipated water usage. Practicing water conservation is extremely important to prolong the life of the soil absorption system. The prompt repair of leaks and installation of appliances and fixtures which use less water will contribute to water conservation. For example, an inoperative float valve in a toilet tank or a dripping faucet can add hundreds of gallons of excess water over a period of a month. It is helpful to do laundry over a period of days rather than all on a single day to avoid large volumes of water entering the system at one time. Try to wash only full loads to conserve on total usage.

UNDESIRABLE CONNECTIONS

Some water sources from a household are not considered as wastewater and therefore should not be connected to an individual sewage disposal system. Homeowners should check sump pumps to see that water from the footing drains is not being pumped to the septic tank. Water softeners can also add many

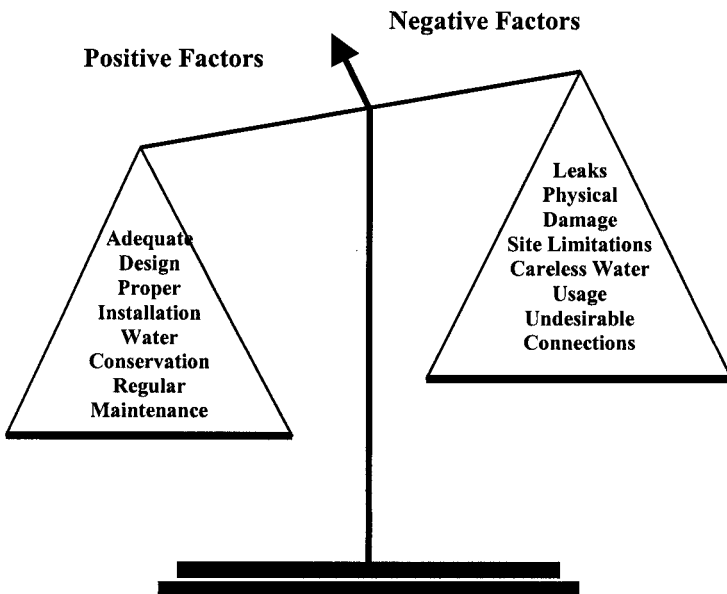
gallons of water to the sewage system depending on the recharge frequency. This recharge water is not considered as a wastewater and therefore can be discharged to the ground surface or to a separate disposal system. Water from a humidifier or dehumidifier may also be adding unnecessary water to the wastewater system. Outside, homeowners should see that surface drainage and eavestrough downspouts are directed away from the wastewater system.

make repairs difficult, interfere with system operations, and should be avoided.

MAINTENANCE

Routine maintenance of the septic tank by pumping accumulated solids every two or three years may increase the life of the soil absorption system and prolong the necessity of field replacement. If solids are allowed to accumulate in the tank, they may be carried over into the disposal field which results in clogging of the soil pores and may cause premature system failure. Inspection of the system and/or pumping of the septic tank is therefore recommended. Homeowners should not utilize their systems for disposal of non-decomposable matter such as cloth and plastic. Garbage grinders increase the accumulation of solids in the septic tank and, depending on the amount of their use, may increase the need for pumping. Commercially available septic tank additives are not necessary for the proper operation of a household disposal system.

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PHYSICAL DAMAGE

Vehicles such as cars and trucks should not be driven over the sewage disposal system as damage to the piping system can lead to unnecessary repairs and expense.

Blacktop, concrete, outbuildings, large above-ground swimming pools, and other structures over the system will

INFORMATION - IT'S AT YOUR LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT

If your system was installed under permit issued by your local health department, there should be a record of the on-site wastewater disposal system. The record may tell you the location, and the size of the septic tank and field or bed. Your local health department welcomes your inquiries.

FOR YOUR RECORDS

SEPTIC TANK MAINTENANCE RECORD

Month/Year	Gallons	Firm	Cost

For more information contact:

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