



Where does your wastewater go?

Out of sight, out of mind – that’s a good way to describe wastewater systems. Most people seldom think about where wastewater goes after they flush the toilet, run the dishwasher or take a shower. But what you do, or don’t do, to maintain your wastewater system may affect the health of your family, your neighborhood, the environment and your bank account!

City Sewer Systems: If you receive a monthly sewer bill from your city or local housing authority, then your wastewater goes to a public wastewater treatment facility of some sort. This facility is constructed to treat wastewater discharged from homes and businesses before it is released back into the environment. Here are some things you can do to reduce the impact of your wastewater and that might even help keep the cost of your sewer bill down:

- **Conserve water** (fix leaks, wash full loads of dishes and laundry, install low-flow toilets and showerheads, etc.).
- **Be careful what you put down the drain.** Hazardous chemicals and wastes should **NEVER** be poured into sinks and toilets or washed into storm drains. Use your Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) facility to dispose of unwanted paints, cleaners, pesticides and other chemicals. They can damage treatment facilities and harm the environment if disposed of improperly. HHW facilities are located at your local recycling or county landfill/solid waste facilities.



On-Site Septic Systems: If you live in a rural area and don’t pay a city sewer bill, then you are probably the proud owner of an on-site septic system. This is a self-contained wastewater treatment system that operates right in your own backyard. When working properly, on-site wastewater systems are an effective and efficient means of treating wastewater from your home. However, on-site systems that are not functioning properly or are not properly maintained can be a source of water pollution and disease.



Why should I be concerned about my on-site septic system?

If you have an on-site septic system, you are responsible for the upkeep and functioning of that system. It is in your best interest to make sure the system is working and properly maintained because:

1. Wastewater treatment systems help protect your health and your local environment. Disease-causing bacteria, viruses, other pathogens, nitrogen, phosphorus and organic wastes are removed and broken down when your system is working right. When it isn’t, these materials contaminate drinking water supplies, ponds and streams, and pose a serious threat to human health, especially that of your family.
2. Keeping your system working is a wise investment. A faulty system reduces property values, and replacing a failed system can cost thousands of dollars.
3. It’s the law. Discharging open sewage into ditches and streams is against the law in Kansas.

Is your on-site septic system working properly?

You can figure out if your on-site wastewater system is working properly by answering a few questions:

1. **Where is your system located?** Most systems consist of a septic tank, distribution system, and a soil absorption field or wastewater stabilization pond (lagoon). If you don’t know where these system components are, check your building records, ask the local environmental health department if they have records, or ask previous owners of your home for the information.

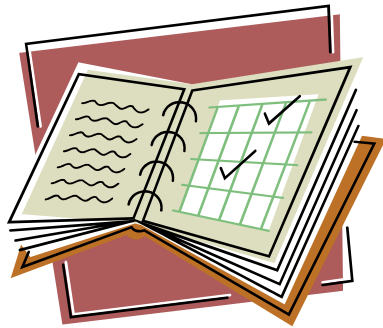
IMPORTANT NOTE: If your system is missing any one of the three components listed above, chances are you have a **failing system** and should contact one of the



resources at the end of this flyer for assistance immediately. Many older homes in northeast Kansas lack a soil absorption field or lagoon. If your system has a pipe draining sewage into an open ditch or stream, seek help right away!

2. Is your septic tank, absorption field or lagoon located within 100 feet of a well, stream or pond? If so, it poses a threat to that water supply. Contact one of the resource agencies below for assistance. Wells located closer than 100 feet from a septic system should be checked frequently for bacteria and nitrates.

3. When was your septic system installed? Most septic systems last 15-40 years or longer, depending on how well they were designed and maintained, but the older your system is, the more likely it is that it does not meet current standards. Old septic tanks can deteriorate, creating a dangerous hidden pit, a liability and a danger to the home owner. Soil absorption fields can get plugged over time, reducing their effectiveness. Even newer systems can fail if located in poor soil, undersized or not maintained.



Yearly inspections will tell you exactly when your tank should be pumped and if there are other problems with the system. **REMEMBER - NEVER CRAWL INSIDE OR LEAN INTO A SEPTIC TANK! The gases inside are toxic and can be deadly!**

4. When was your septic tank last pumped or inspected? Regular pumping is the most important thing you can do to maintain your system. Keeping good records each time your septic system is pumped, inspected, or repaired will also help you make cost-effective maintenance decisions. This information will be valuable if you ever decide to sell your property.

How often should your tank be pumped? The number of people in your household, amount of water used, and size of your septic tank determines frequency of pumping. As a rule of thumb, septic tanks should be inspected every year, and most systems should be pumped out every 3-5 years.

Other signs of trouble to look for:

Think about it --- the cost of pumping a septic tank (\$80 to \$250) is far less than the expense of replacing a soil absorption field (**several thousand dollars**) that has become clogged by solids escaping from a too-full septic tank, or the expense and work of cleaning your home following a sewage back-up.



- * Foul odors in your home or yard
- * Slow or backed-up drains in the house indicating a clog in the pipes, soil absorption field or elsewhere in the distribution system
- * Repeated intestinal illnesses in your family (may indicate a contaminated well)
- * Wet, spongy ground or lush plant growth near the septic tank or soil absorption field, indicating a leak or plugged pipes
- * Algae blooms and excessive pond weeds growing in nearby ponds or streams

For help with upgrading your on-site septic system or for more information about on-site system maintenance, water quality, etc. contact any of the following agencies. They have information, technical and financial assistance available:

Local Conservation Districts: Atchison County (913-833-5740); Brown County (785-742-2012); Jackson County (785-364-4638); Jefferson County (785-863-2201); Nemaha County (785-336-2186)

Northeast Kansas Environmental Services (NEKES): 785-985-2778, 785-364-2760 or www.nekes.org

Delaware River Watershed Restoration & Protection Strategy (WRAPS): 785-945-6292 or www.delawareriverwatershed.org

Kansas Department of Health & Environment (KDHE): 785-842-4600 or www.kdheks.gov/nps/lepp

