

## Use Water Efficiently

The average indoor water use in a typical single-family home can be as much as 70 gallons per individual, per day. Just a single leaky or running toilet can add as much as 200 gallons of water per day.

All the water a household sends down its pipes ends up in its septic system. The more water a household conserves, the less water enters the septic system. Efficient water use improves the operation of a septic system and reduces the risk of malfunctions.

- **High-efficiency toilets.**

Toilet use accounts for 25 to 30 percent of household water use. Many older homes have toilets with 3.5- to 5-gallon reservoirs, while newer, high-efficiency toilets use 1.6 gallons of water or less per flush. Replacing existing toilets with high-efficiency models is an easy way to reduce the amount of household water entering your septic system.

- **Faucet aerators and high-efficiency showerheads.**

Faucet aerators, high-efficiency showerheads, and shower flow restrictors help reduce water use and the volume of water entering your septic system.

- **Washing machines.**

Washing small loads of laundry on your washing machine's large-load cycle wastes water and energy. By selecting the proper load size, you will reduce water waste. If you are unable to select a load size, run only full loads of laundry.

Try to spread washing machine use throughout the week. Doing all household laundry in one day might seem like a time-saver, but it can harm your septic system. It will not allow a septic tank enough time to treat waste and could flood your drainfield.

Washing machines that bear the [ENERGY STAR](#) label use 35 percent less energy and 50 percent less water than standard models. Other Energy Star appliances provide significant energy and water savings.

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## Properly Dispose of Waste

Whether you flush it down the toilet, grind it in the garbage disposal, or pour it down the sink, shower, or bath, everything that goes down your drain ends up in your septic system. What goes down the drain affects how well your septic system works.

## **Toilets aren't trash cans!**

Your septic system is not a trash can. An easy rule of thumb is not to flush anything besides human waste and toilet paper. ***Never flush:***

- Cooking grease or oil
- Non-flushable wipes, such as baby wipes or other wet wipes
- Photographic solutions
- Feminine hygiene products
- Condoms
- Dental floss
- Diapers
- Cigarette butts
- Coffee grounds
- Cat litter
- Paper towels
- Pharmaceuticals
- Household chemicals like gasoline, oil, pesticides, antifreeze, and paint or paint thinners

## **Think at the sink!**

Your septic system contains a collection of living organisms that digest and treat household waste. Pouring toxins down your drain can kill these organisms and harm your septic system.

Whether you are at the kitchen sink, bathtub, or utility sink:

- Avoid chemical drain openers for a clogged drain. Instead, use boiling water or a drain snake.
- Never pour cooking oil or grease down the drain.
- Never pour oil-based paints, solvents, or large volumes of toxic cleaners down the drain. Even latex paint waste should be minimized.
- Eliminate or limit the use of a garbage disposal. This will significantly reduce the amount of fats, grease, and solids that enter your septic tank and could clog the drainfield.

## Frequent Questions on Caring for Septic Systems

- **Should I be careful of what I pour down the drain?**
  - Yes. Many materials that might be poured down the drain do not easily decompose. This can be harmful to the healthy bacteria that grow in your septic tank and drainfield to help break down organic matter. Do not pour grease (such as fats, butter, wax, cheese, heavy cream), liquid wastes (such as pesticides, drain cleaners, household chemicals, paints, paint thinners), oils or coffee grounds down the drain. If you have a garbage disposal, limit its use because food waste can add an unnecessary amount of solid material to your septic tank. Harmful chemicals put down your drain can also be discharged into the groundwater and can impact drinking water supplies and the environment.
- **Does using a garbage disposal unit impact my septic system?**
  - Yes. Using an in-sink garbage disposal unit can impact how often a septic tank needs to be pumped. Food waste usually is slowly digested by the healthy bacteria in a septic tank and can accumulate as scum and sludge. If a large amount of water enters the septic tank or the tank fills up with solids, it can push the solids into the drainfield, causing the pipes to clog and increasing the thickness of the biomat (a bacteria layer that forms on the bottom and sides of the drainfield trenches).
- **What can I flush down the toilet?**
  - Only flush human waste and toilet paper down the toilet.
  - **Never flush these items down the toilet because they could clog your septic system and cause a failure:**
    - Cooking grease or oil
    - Non-flushable wipes, such as baby wipes or other wet wipes
    - Photographic solutions
    - Feminine hygiene products
    - Condoms
    - Dental floss
    - Diapers
    - Cigarette butts

- Coffee grounds
  - Cat litter
  - Paper towels
  - Pharmaceuticals
  - Household chemicals like gasoline, oil, pesticides, antifreeze, and paint or paint thinners
- **Should I avoid driving or building on my drainfield?**
    - Yes. Most drainfields are constructed in open lawn areas and are not designed to handle vehicles or heavy equipment driving on them. The weight of vehicles and heavy equipment compacts the soil, which can damage pipes. Impermeable materials, such as concrete and asphalt, should not be laid on top of a drainfield because they reduce evaporation and the supply of oxygen to the soil. Oxygen is critical to the healthy bacteria in your septic system and the proper breakdown of sewage by soil microorganisms.