



## THE QUICK AND DIRTY

**PROPER TREATMENT OF WASTEWATER IS VITAL** for the health and safety of yourself, your family and your neighbors.

**YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM IS DESIGNED TO TREAT** only household wastewater. It depends on natural bacteria to digest the waste material in the tank. It's a busy little ecosystem right outside your house, but *it's very sensitive*.

**CONTAMINANTS LISTED IN THIS GUIDE** can clog the tank or kill the beneficial bacteria, upsetting the natural equilibrium. This can lead to system failure, exposure to health hazards and expensive repairs.

## THE GOOD NEWS

**FOLLOW THIS GUIDE TO OPTIMIZE PERFORMANCE.** Post the septic system do's and don'ts on your refrigerator as a reminder for your entire family.

**STUDY THE "FLUSH RESPONSIBLY" PANEL** on the inside of this flyer to review the care and feeding of your septic system.

## PUMP YOUR TANK

**REGULAR INSPECTIONS AND PUMPING** are the best and least expensive ways to keep your septic system in good working order. Your septic tank needs to be pumped at least every **THREE YEARS** to remove accumulated sludge and floating scum.



The Ketchikan Gateway Borough's sludge-pumping program is designed to make tank pumping as simple as possible:

- There are no additional costs to you.
- You will be notified by mail when your tank is scheduled to be pumped.
- All you must do is sign and return the authorization form.

## SPOT A PROBLEM?



**CONTAMINATED WATER** seeping out of a drainfield is a sign of a fault in a septic system. The spot is also a potential health hazard. Be familiar with the operation of your system and watch for indications of problems. Check out the "Rate Your Risk" and "System Inspection Basics" panels inside this flyer for useful guidance.

## WE CAN HELP

**IF YOU SUSPECT THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG** with any part of your system, you're probably right. Correcting a problem early can protect your family's health—and save you money.

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS** about your system, contact the Ketchikan Gateway Borough Public Works Department right away. You can also talk with a local engineer or a qualified service provider.

**MORE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE FROM THESE SOURCES**

Ketchikan Gateway Borough  
Public Works Department 228-6670

<https://www.kgbak.us/144/Public-Works>

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation  
(DEC) Juneau 907-465-5180

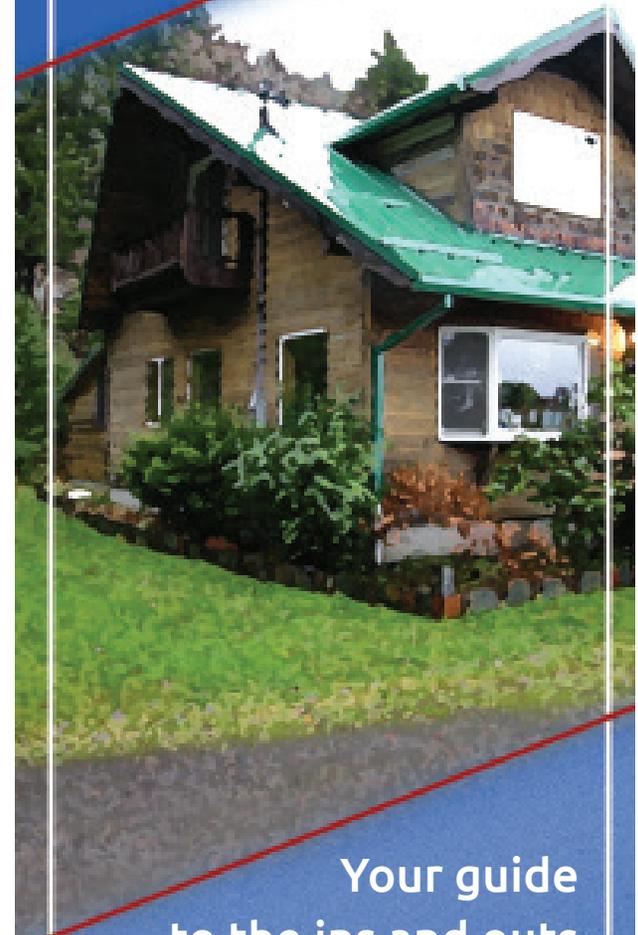
[dec.alaska.gov/water/wwdp/onsite/index.htm](http://dec.alaska.gov/water/wwdp/onsite/index.htm)

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)  
SepticSmart Website

[water.epa.gov/infrastructure/septic/septicmart.cfm](http://water.epa.gov/infrastructure/septic/septicmart.cfm)

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# SEPTIC SYSTEMS 101



Your guide  
to the ins and outs  
of your septic system

Ketchikan Gateway Borough Public Works  
Ketchikan, Alaska

## FLUSH RESPONSIBLY!

### **NOT OKAY TO FLUSH** **NOT OKAY FOR THE DRAIN**

- Fats, greases and cooking oils **NO**
- Food waste, citrus and coffee grinds **NO**
- Cat litter, cigarette butts and condoms **NO**
- Chemical additives **NO**
- "Flushable" wipes and diapers **NO**
- Household garbage **NO**
- Feminine hygiene items **NO**
- Hair, string, dental floss and cotton swabs **NO**
- Hazardous chemicals, paints and solvents **NO**
- Prescription and over-the-counter medications **NO**
- Paper towels, napkins and tissues **NO**
- Toilet bowl freshener hanging tabs **NO**

### **DON'T USE TOILETS & SINKS AS GARBAGE CANS!**

#### **OKAY TO FLUSH**

- Liquid and solid human waste **YES**
- Toilet paper **YES**

## **RATE YOUR RISK** RATE YOUR SYSTEM'S RISK OF FAILING

How old is your septic system?

- A) 5 years or less
- B) 6 to 20 years
- C) Older than 20 years

How many years go by before your septic tank is pumped?

- A) 3 to 5 years
- B) More than 5 years
- C) Never done / unsure

How often do you pour oil, paint, grease, etc. down the drain?

- A) Never
- B) Occasionally
- C) Often

Do your sinks, tub or shower drain slowly?

- A) Never
- B) 2 or 3 times a year
- C) 3+ times a year

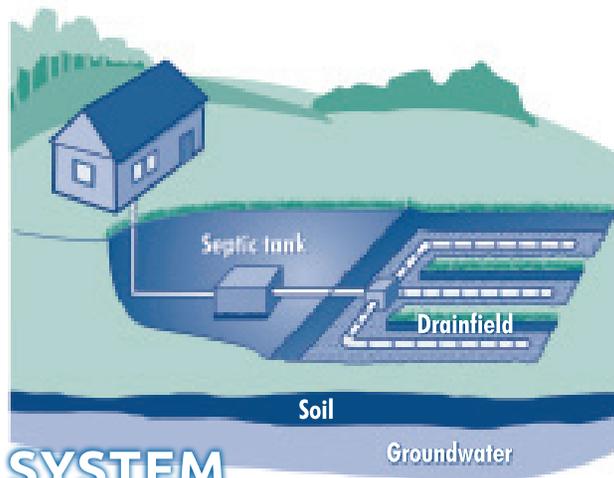
Do vehicles or heavy equipment drive over the drainfield?

- A) Never
- B) Occasionally
- C) Often

Do wet spots in your yard remain saturated during dry spells?

- A) Never
- B) Very rarely
- C) Often

**IF YOU ANSWER "C" FOR THREE OR MORE, YOUR SYSTEM NEEDS A CHECKUP!**



## SYSTEM INSPECTION BASICS

### TWO COMMON SEPTIC TANKS IN KETCHIKAN

**JET** Rectangular concrete tank with concrete riser sections. An aerator feeds oxygen to beneficial bacteria in the tank.

**WHITewater** Black cylindrical fiberglass tank with a green cover. An air compressor is separate from the tank, inside your house.

### KNOW YOUR SEPTIC TANK

**LOCATION OF TANK** Don't drive or park on the tank; keep the area clear of vegetation and garbage, and accessible for inspection.

**SOUNDS OF OPERATION** Run the aerator or air compressor 24/7 for best results. Know the sounds of proper operation.

**ODORS** Mild odors from the tank are common even in proper operation, but strong odors probably indicate a problem.

**THE LIDS** Covers must be secure to prevent accidental entry.

### TWO COMMON DISPOSAL METHODS

**DRAINFIELD** A buried network of perforated pipes provides for a controlled release of treated wastewater into the ground.

**MARINE OUTFALL** Where ocean access is convenient, treated wastewater is released into marine waters below minus 4 feet.

### KNOW YOUR WASTEWATER DISPOSAL SYSTEM

**STAY CLEAR OF BURIED PIPING** Don't drive or park on the drainfield: Crushed pipes and compacted soils can cause blockages. Grass is good over the drainfield, but not other vegetation.

**WATER TABLE CONDITIONS** Abnormal standing surface water or saturated ground may indicate broken or clogged pipes, or a failing drainfield.

**ODORS** The drainfield should be odor-free.

**OUTFALL ALIGNMENT** Unsecured pipes can shift, especially during severe storms. Inspect the outfall regularly for open joints and broken pipes.

## EXTEND THE LIFE OF YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM

Inspect your system regularly and mind the signs. See the panel at left for signs of problems. "Out of sight, out of mind" can cost you money—thousands of dollars in cases of system failure—and can expose you, your family and your neighbors to health hazards.

Don't drive, park or build over the septic tank and drainfield.

Don't allow vegetation or trees to grow on or next to your septic tank and drainfield. Their roots can damage and clog the tank and underground disposal pipes.

Maintain grass over the drainfield to disperse and soak up precipitation. This helps the drainfield work more efficiently.

Divert rainwater and roof drains away from the tank and drainfield. Grade the surface for efficient drainage.

Use water wisely and fix leaking faucets and toilets to prevent overloading your system, which leads to under-treated wastewater. EPA has water conservation tips at [www.epa.gov/watersense](http://www.epa.gov/watersense).

Use the garbage disposal sparingly. Additional food nutrients divert the beneficial bacteria from processing the sewage.

Use bleach and household cleaners in moderation. To clear clogged pipes, try mechanical methods before choosing liquid drain cleaners. These chemicals are toxic to your septic system.

Don't use antibacterial soaps. These soaps can kill the beneficial bacteria inside the septic tank.

Use dryer sheets rather than liquid fabric softeners; again, it's about minimizing the chemicals that are toxic to the beneficial bacteria.

Use phosphate-free detergents. Phosphates encourage the growth of algae and have a detrimental effect on water bodies.

Don't use chemical additives marketed for septic systems. Natural bacteria inside your system generate their own enzymes to digest nutrients. Our cool temperatures render most "performance enhancers" useless; these products may even harm your system and the environment. Regular pumping of your tank is a more reliable, cost-effective solution.



Follow this guide to inspect and maintain your septic system.