

# WATERFRONT WISDOM — HEALTHY HABIT #6: PROPERLY MAINTAIN YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM

As a waterfront homeowner, you have a unique opportunity to contribute to the health of your local waterway. Many activities we conduct near the waterfront, in our lawns and gardens and around our home, impact water quality. This is even more critical to riparian homeowners because runoff doesn't have far to travel before reaching the water. We can prevent water pollution by being aware that our actions DO impact water quality. We can all make a difference by practicing Healthy Habits for Clean Water.

**CHALLENGE:** Excess nutrients and harmful pathogens entering surface water and shallow groundwater supplies that can make us sick and degrade water quality.

**CAUSE:** Improperly maintained or failing septic systems. Signs of a failing septic system are odors, surfacing sewage, wet spots or lush vegetation on or near the drainfield, plumbing or septic tank backups, or gurgling sounds in the plumbing system.

**SOLUTION:** HOMEOWNERS SHOULD PROPERLY OPERATE AND MAINTAIN THEIR SEPTIC SYSTEM TO AVOID FAILURES. REGULAR PUMPING OF THE SEPTIC TANK IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENT OF A SEPTIC SYSTEM.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**GET PUMPED!** Have your system inspected every 2-3 years by a reputable septic tank service contractor. When necessary, have your tank pumped out. Septic tanks should be pumped every 3-5 years, at a minimum.

**CONSERVE WATER:** Minimize water inputs into your system by installing water-saving fixtures such as low-flow toilets, faucets and showerheads.

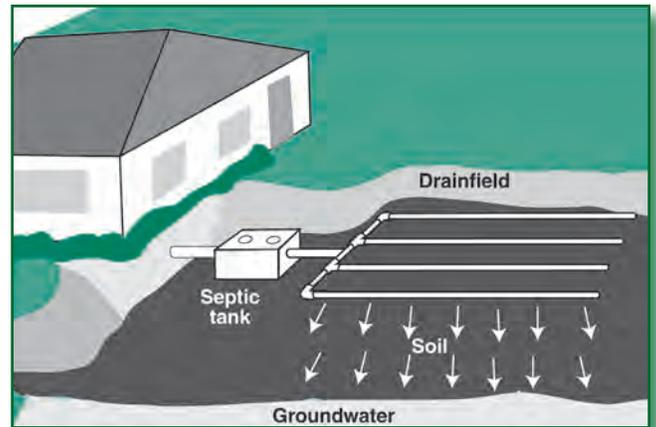
**REDIRECT:** Point downspouts away from the drainfield.

**MINIMIZE:** Reduce the use of harsh chemicals that get washed down the drain and into your septic system. The chemicals can actually kill the beneficial bacteria necessary for the break down of the wastes entering your system.

**PITCH IN!** Dispose of non-degradable items such as fat, grease and oil, hair, tampons and disposable diapers in the trash. These materials will not break down and can cause clogging and premature failure of your system.

**AVOID USING A GARBAGE DISPOSAL:** Try composting kitchen scraps such as egg shells, coffee grounds, vegetable wastes and other organic kitchen wastes.

**SITE RIGHT!** Plant shrubs and trees an adequate distance from the drainfield and septic tank. The root systems could interfere with the infrastructure which can lead to premature system failures. Plant only grass over and near your septic system.



**ALL NATURAL:** Supplements and additives do not improve operation of your system. Some may actually harm your system by causing solids to be carried into the drainfield, which causes premature clogging. In addition, supplements containing organic solvents can cause groundwater contamination.

**NO PARKING:** Don't drive or park vehicles on any part of your septic system. Doing so can compact the soil in your drainfield or damage the pipes, tank or other septic system components.

**KNOW YOUR STUFF!** Learn about your system and how it works. Ask for Water Quality Bulletin, "WQ-39: Managing Your Septic System" from your local MSU Extension office.