

## **Township Enacts Mandatory Regulations for On-Lot Septic Systems**

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP) mandated in Act 537 (1996) that townships adopt an official Sewage Facilities Plan for the provision of adequate sewage systems and management of the disposal of wastewater for the health, safety and welfare of all residents of the Commonwealth.

West Rockhill Township began development of a Sewage Facilities Plan with the Township Engineer in 2004 and completed the process in 2012. An interim Act 537 Plan was approved in 2011. Resolution 2011-16 stipulated that there would be increased level of municipal involvement in sewage facilities planning and maintenance via implementation of a public education program for On-Lot Disposal Systems (OLDS) and the adoption of an Ordinance to implement an OLDS Management Program. At that time, information was posted to our website regarding the operation, care and maintenance of on-lot septic systems (<http://www.westrockhilltownship.org/home/sewer-septic>) and educational information was placed at the township building.

West Rockhill Township is currently poised to adopt the final Sewage Facilities Plan, which was advertised for public review and comment late in 2012 and has been reviewed and approved by PADEP. This Plan will have been adopted by the time this newsletter is published.

***Do you know how your sewage system works? Do you know how to properly operate and maintain your sewage system?*** What follows is educational information for our residents about their sewage disposal system.

### **Act Sewage Facilities Plan**

The "Act 537" Sewage Facilities Plan provides a comprehensive planning document to identify and resolve existing sewage disposal problems, avoid potential sewage problems resulting from new land development, and to provide for future sewage disposal needs within the community. **If you own an on-lot sewage disposal system, West Rockhill Township will require proof of a pump out a minimum of once every three years.** Maintenance agreements with financial security, periodic Township inspection, and annual reporting will be required for all holding tanks, individual spray and drip irrigation systems, and small flow treatment facilities and experimental systems permitted by PADEP. Residents with on-lot systems will receive a letter detailing the new requirements in the near future.

### **On-Lot Sewage Disposal Systems**

Every homeowner with an on-lot sewage disposal system should be aware of what type of system they have, understand its operation, and know how to maintain it properly. The best designed and properly installed on-lot sewage disposal system will still malfunction if the homeowner does not properly operate and maintain the system. In addition to requiring costly repairs, malfunctioning systems can contaminate surface and groundwaters, cause various health problems, and spread disease, as well as create unsightly messes and foul odors when raw sewage surfaces in the yard or backs up into the home.

## How an Onlot (Septic) System Functions

There are two basic types of anaerobic (without Oxygen) on-lot systems; those with gravity distribution systems and those with pressure distribution systems. In both types, there are three major components: the septic tank, the distribution box (gravity system) or dosing tank (pressure system) and the absorption area

Sewage flows to the septic tank, where the primary treatment process takes place. In the tank, the heaviest matter settles to the bottom (forming sludge) and the lighter matter (scum) floats on top of a somewhat clear liquid called effluent. While the sludge and scum must be pumped out regularly, the clear liquid flows out of the tank to a distribution box or dosing tank, and is then directed to the absorption area by gravity flow or through pressurized pipes. Within the absorption area, this effluent exits through pipes into a layer of gravel and then percolates through the soil for additional treatment. The bacteria in the soil neutralize many of the contaminants in the wastewater.

### Signs of an onlot system in trouble include:

- Toilet runs sluggish
- Sewer odors in the house and/or drinking water
- Illness, often to household visitors
- Sponginess around septic tank, distribution box or dosing tank and absorption area
- Surfacing raw sewage
- Dosing pump runs constantly or not at all
- Dosing tank alarm light is on
- Backup of sewage into laundry tubs or other fixtures

### Preventing Malfunctions

Homeowners can help prevent malfunctions and ensure the long-term use of their on-lot system by doing the following:

- Conserve water and reduce waste flow into the septic tank
- **Have the septic tank pumped at least every 3 years**
- Avoid putting chemicals in the septic system
- Do not use the toilet to dispose of bulky, slowly decomposing wastes
- Inspect the septic tank, pipes and drainage field annually
- Maintain accurate records of the septic system (design, installation, location, inspections, pumpings, malfunctions, repairs)
- Prevent run-off from downspouts, sump pumps, and paved surfaces from getting into the septic system
- Keep heavy vehicles, equipment and livestock away from the septic system
- Do not plant trees and shrubs over or close to the septic system

## **Conserving Water and Reducing Waste Water**

On-lot systems not only treat and dispose of domestic sewage from toilets, they also receive wastewater from various other household fixtures, including baths, showers, kitchen sinks, garbage disposals, automatic dishwashers and washing machines.

Conserving water and reducing the amount of "waste flow" from household activities is an important step to ensuring long-term use. The more water-using devices in a household, the greater the burden is on the septic system.

Following are some helpful water conservation tips and a comparison of water usage between conventional fixtures versus water-saving fixtures:

Use the dishwasher and laundry washer only when they are loaded to capacity.

- Top Loading Laundry Washer 35-50 gal/load
- Front Loading Laundry Washer 22-25 gal/load

Fix leaky faucets and plumbing fixtures quickly. Install flow control devices on faucets.

- Regular Faucet Aerator 2.5-6 gal/min
- Flow regulating Aerator .5-2.5 gal/min

Take short showers instead of baths. Install flow control water saving devices on showerheads.

- Conventional Showerhead 3-15 gal/min
- Water Saving Showerhead 2-3 gal/min

Reduce water use each time you flush the toilet. Put a heavy device such as a brick in a plastic bag or a water-filled plastic bottle in the reservoir or install a low flow toilet.

- Conventional Toilet 4-6 gal/flush
- Water Saving Toilet 3-1.6 gal/flush

Use the garbage disposal sparingly if you have one. Disposal waste places a greater burden on the septic system. If you have a garden, compost the material instead.

## **Pumping Your Septic Tank**

A septic tank accumulates solids (sludge) and scum which should be pumped out **at least every three years**. Larger households generally require more frequent pump outs (every one or two years).

## **Your toilet is Not A Trash Can**

Trillions of living, beneficial bacteria constantly treat and decompose raw sewage in a septic system. The

effectiveness of these bacteria can be impaired if harmful substances and chemicals are put into the septic system. Harmful substances/chemicals include:

- oils and grease
- gasoline
- antifreeze
- varnishes and paints and solvents
- harsh drain and toilet bowl cleaners
- laundry detergents
- bleach
- pesticides
- old drugs & medications

Remember, what goes into your toilet and drains may eventually end up in your drinking water.

Also **NEVER** flush bulky, hard to decompose items such as sanitary napkins, diapers, paper towels, cigarette filters, plastics, eggshells, bones or coffee grounds down the toilet because they can clog the system.

You can read more at : [www.westrockhilltownship.org/Sewer/Septic](http://www.westrockhilltownship.org/Sewer/Septic)