

Septic System Information for Homeowners in Kingwood Township

In Kingwood Township, all homes have septic systems and they are *the responsibility of each homeowner!!*

Septic systems must be used properly every day and inspected/pumped every 2-3 years!

The following information provides tips to help you manage your septic system to avoid problems, costly repairs and even more costly replacement. Septic replacement does happen. The Hunterdon County Department of Health states that 50% of all septic applications to them are for **existing septic failures**. Can you think of dealing with the inconvenience of being without a septic system while the one you have is being repaired or replaced? And the cost! Malfunctions *can* effect the drinking water supply, too.

How the Sewage Treatment Plant on Your Property Works.

Septic systems are actually small sewage treatment plants used to treat household sewage. A septic system includes: the **plumbing** that takes your sewage from inside the house to the **septic tank** outside which serves as a settling basin where solids can accumulate and partially breakdown by bacterial action; a **distribution box** that sends the remaining liquid sewage into the **laterals** (parallel pipes) which along with the **absorption or drain field** are where the liquids seep into the soil. The liquids are further filtered through the soil where bacteria continue to break down some pollutants. The result – ground water recharge.

Septic tanks MUST be inspected every 2-3 years and pumped as needed, or they will eventually FAIL.

Even if the system appears to be working well, by not pumping the septic tank the sludge level can build up high enough in the tank that solids flow out into the laterals clogging the system which then allow untreated wastewater to be released into the soil causing ground water pollution. This leads to septic system failure and expensive repairs or replacement of the system. Costs of \$30,000 or more are common. Prevention is cheap, currently as low as \$225 to \$250² per pump! The pumping cost must be planned into your home maintenance budget.

Something to Think About.

OUTDOORS

Do you know where your septic system is located?

- Know where your septic tank, manhole cover, and absorption fields are located.
- If your house is new and you are the first owner, the engineer who designed the septic system should provide you a copy of the site plan with septic design and location. Keep the site plan with the house.
- For older homes with second or more owners, the Hunterdon County Department of Health (788-1351) can usually provide you with location information.

Access to the system.

- The septic pumping company needs to be able to get to your septic system to pump it. Buildings, fences, walls and shrubs should be placed to allow entry. Remember, pumping will take place every 2-3 years.

Parking and Buildings.

- No parking of automobiles, trucks, or heavy equipment on the laterals or tank.
- Never drive over the system.
- Sheds, pool houses or patios should not be built on the septic system.

These activities can compact the soil and crush the laterals.

Plants.

- Keep trees and shrubs away from the tank, absorption field and drain lines. Roots can damage the system. No shrubs or trees on mound systems; grass is best.

Surface water.

- Divert sump pump discharges and roof drains away from septic field NOT over it.

IN THE HOUSE

Grease.

- If grease passes through the tank and out into the drainage field it can clog the drainage holes in the laterals. Wipe grease from cooking pans with paper towels and dispose in the trash. Large amounts of cooking oil can be drained into a container then into the trash.

Bleaches and drain cleaners.

- Minimize or eliminate the use of them. They can kill the bacteria that help break down the solids in the tank.

System recovery from a day of heavy use.

- Allow your system time to recover after using the most water. Washing clothes, running the dishwasher, bathing, all around the same time of day decreases the efficiency of the septic system. Avoid more than three loads of wash per day.

- Set the dishwasher to run overnight and you will save money on electricity too.

Conserve water.

- To minimize the demand on the system repair leaky faucets and toilets. The amount of extra water going into the system can be staggering. Take shorter showers, use low flow fixtures for shower heads and faucets.

Down the drain.

- Do NOT put into the system coffee grounds, cigarette butts, latex paint, feminine hygiene products, fats, oils, cat litter, prescription drugs, disposable toilet cleaning sponges or anything else that will not decompose. Use a sink strainer/stopper in the kitchen to catch large pieces of food. Think “sewage only”!

Garbage disposals.

- Do not use them. Food items take longer to degrade and can overload the tank. Disposals are better suited in towns with sewage treatment plants.

Water softeners.

- State of New Jersey DEP regulations (N.J.A.C.7:9A) prohibit septic systems from receiving backwash from water softeners¹.

Septic system additives.

- Today’s thinking is additives do not improve the system’s function and can actually damage it by causing solids to break down too much so that they flush out into the absorption field, leading to repairs/replacement of the septic system.
- Be careful of product advertisements or pushy sales — nothing works more effectively than proper use and inspections.

PROBLEM SYMPTOMS

Signs of problems include gurgling sounds in toilets, slow drains, exceptionally green grass over the absorption field, wet areas over or just downhill of the absorption field, and septic odors near the absorption field or in the house.

If you notice a problem, contact a septic system service (listed under “Septic” in the Yellow Pages) to have the tank pumped and a complete inspection.

Remember – each septic system is a small sewage treatment plant, and you are the operator! In Kingwood Township 100% of residents get their water from wells. Help keep yourself and others healthy – PUMP YOUR SEPTIC!

In the Event of a Septic System Failure.

If your septic systems fails, you must contact the Hunterdon County Department of Health (908) 788-1351 to apply for a permit for a septic repair or replacement. The application is available at their office in the County complex off Route 12 near the main Library.

For more information visit these related web sites:

Hunterdon County Department of Health: www.co/hunterdon.nj.us/health.htm
ANJEC: www.anjec.org/html/waterresources;
Rutgers Cooperative Extension: www.rcc.edu/pubs/ and Spruce Run Initiative: www.raritanbasin.org

Approximate Costs for Septic System Repairs and Replacement²

Pumping	\$225 (minimum) surcharge may apply for additional gallons
Application to County for Septic Repair	\$80
Replace Septic Tank	\$3380
Repair Distribution Box (D-Box)	\$800-1000
Laterals (30 feet)	\$1500 per 30 ft. of laterals
Alteration of existing system	\$29,000
Contractor cost to come to site	\$1000
Jetting of Septic Lateral	\$850 per lateral
New System	\$35,000-38,000



This article on septic systems was prepared by the Kingwood Township Environmental Commission, 2007, using resources from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC); County of Hunterdon, Department of Health; South Branch Watershed Association; Spruce Run Initiative, a Cooperative Effort of Bethlehem, Lebanon and Union Townships, Glen Gardner and High Bridge Boroughs, and the New Jersey Water Supply Authority; and the Stoney Brook Millstone Watershed Association.

References

1. Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC). Resource Paper, *Septic System Management for Clean Water*. Pg.2. 2002
2. County of Hunterdon, Department of Health. Office handout.