



Don't Let Guests Park On Septic Field

The holiday season with its happy gatherings of family and friends may not seem like the perfect time to talk about proper use and maintenance of septic systems, but it is.

Holiday preparations and get-togethers can mean hosting out-of-town guests who can overwhelm a system and may not be familiar with necessary septic system precautions. No one needs the extra cost of repairs or cleanups, especially during the gift-giving season.

Properly maintained and used, septic systems are a safe way to treat and disperse wastewater in millions of homes across the country. Unfortunately, back-ups and overflows can lead to costly repair bills that can run into the hundreds, or even thousands, of dollars. Protecting your property value can be a big incentive, but there's also the need to safeguard the health of you and your family. Nitrogen runoff from faulty systems can contaminate your well water or community drinking water supply. The pollutants can also make seafood unsafe to eat, turn lakes and rivers green with algae, and rob underwater life of oxygen.

So residents who use septic tanks may want to follow a few simple steps to avoid problems during the holidays. To prevent problems, here are some tips to keep your septic system flowing smoothly:

- **Tell people what not to flush.** Ask your guests to only put things in the drain or toilet that belong there. For example, hair combings, dental floss, disposable diapers, feminine hygiene products, cigarette butts, and condoms can cause problems for septic systems.
- **Identify your drainage field and be sure to keep cars and heavy equipment off of it.** Remind guests that the drainage field is an essential part of the septic system and that they should not park their vehicles on

sections of the yard where the weight could damage buried pipes or disrupt underground flow.

- **Keep your system maintained.** Your authorized practitioner will recommend a maintenance schedule for you during which your tank may require pumping and other maintenance work may be performed on your system. Some systems may require more frequent maintenance. Some regions may require specific cleaning and inspections every three to five years. Check with your municipality for compliance requirements.

The results will not only be a merrier holiday; properly maintained septic systems protect our drinking water, our favorite fishing holes and the lakes and rivers we use for recreation. Septic system use is growing. The U.S. EPA has found that about 25 percent of new developments are served by septic systems. Statistics indicate that 10 to 20 percent of septic systems fail. Malfunctioning systems are the third most common source of ground water contamination.

So remember that following proper guidelines will help prevent expensive repairs and keep the environment clean—not only during the holiday season—but throughout the entire year.

