

# SEPTIC TANK MAINTENANCE

ABC Pumping Services

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# SEPTIC TANK MAINTENANCE

Your **septic tank** is constantly working for you, despite the fact that you probably don't think twice about septic system health or maintenance. But making sure that your septic tank gets the attention it deserves is important; your **septic tank** collects sewage, and when it is not properly maintained, a variety of problems can occur. One common problem seen with septic tanks is a drainfield overload, which results in flooding of sewage onto a property, and backed up toilets and drains.

Maintaining your septic tank should be a top priority if you're a home or business owner that relies on a septic system for sewage storage and wastewater treatment. At ABC Pumping Services, we can help you to understand how to protect your septic system and mitigate problems, as well as provide you with emergency septic services when necessary. Four key things that you should do to maintain your septic tank include the following.

## Chapter 1: Septic Tank Maintenance

# CONSERVE WATER AND FIX LEAKS



One of the most important things that you can do as a person who relies on a septic system is to ensure that your home or business property is free from any water leaks or drips and to conserve water whenever possible. Not only does water conservation have a number of environmental benefits--not to mention financial benefits!--but wasted water can lead to septic overload. The goal is to minimize the amount of wastewater that your septic system accumulates; when it is overloaded, its ability to treat wastewater is hindered.

## How Does Conserving Water Help to Maintain a Septic System?

Saving water is one of the many things that you can do to prolong the life of your septic system. This is because when a septic system is overloaded with too much water, its ability to treat wastewater is significantly impaired. This creates the risk for bacterial contamination of drinking sources and natural water sources, leading to water pollution. It also puts more stress on the septic system, reducing its lifespan. Of course, saving water not only helps your septic system but is also overall beneficial for the environment and your budget.

## Tips for Conserving Water in Your Home

Conserving water is something that is easy to do with a little effort. Here are some ways

that you can conserve water in your home (or business!) and reduce the risk of overload for your septic system:

- Fix leaks and drips. The **Environmental Protection Agency** (EPA) reports that household leaks can waste more than one trillion gallons of water annually nationwide, and that the average household's leaks can account for more than 10,000 gallons of wasted water every year – that's a lot for your septic system to handle! If you're not sure if you have a leak, you should look at your water usage – if you're using more than 12,000 gallons per month for a family of four, you likely have a leak. Leaks are possible in toilets, faucets, showerheads, and on outdoor water sources.
- Pay attention to indoor water use. In addition to repairing leaks, another thing that you can do to conserve water is to pay attention to your indoor water use. Things that can help you to reduce indoor water use include:
  - Only flush the toilet when necessary;
  - Upgrade to energy efficient appliances if possible – newer appliances have energy and water saving wash options; and
  - Cut down on your shower times, and try to only shower once a day.

You can also consider installing low flow faucets and showerheads, and replacing old toilets with more energy efficient ones.

## **Conserving Water Can Have a Big Impact**

Remember, when you conserve water and fix leaks and drips, you could be saving tens of thousands of gallons of water every year, which puts more money in your pocket, saves energy, and reduces the risk of early septic tank failure. Conserving water and managing drips and leaks is essential for all home and business owners who rely on a septic system for wastewater treatment.

## Chapter 2: Septic Tank Maintenance

## REPLACE OLD FIXTURES WITH NEW “LOW FLOW” TYPES

One way that you can reduce wastewater and conserve more is to replace old fixtures in your home with new, energy-efficient “low flow” types. Low flow appliances moderate the flow of water and can be installed in faucets, aerators, showerheads, toilets, and urinals. Not only will this help reduce the work that your septic system is tasked with, but they also save energy, save money, and help to save the planet.

As mentioned in other sections of this septic tank maintenance guide, reducing septic tank overload is a key part of maintaining its health and preserving the integrity of the system.

When a septic tank is overloaded with too much water, this impairs its ability to treat the wastewater, creating a risk of both overflow and bacterial contamination, which can be hazardous for your family and your community.



One way that you can reduce the amount of wastewater that your family produces and that enters your septic system, ultimately improving the health of your system, is to replace old fixtures in your home with new “low flow” models.

### What Are Low Flow Fixtures?

Low flow fixtures are faucet and showerhead types that help to reduce the amount of water that a person uses, even when the water is running. These water-efficient fixtures can reduce the average flow of a faucet by up to 30 percent, potentially saving billions of dollars worldwide every year.

### How Do You Know If Something Is Low Flow?

If a faucet or showerhead is low flow, it will be labeled as such. The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) recommends looking for the WaterSense label.

## Low-Flush Toilets

While not technically “low flow,” there are also low flush toilets available on the market today that essentially work in the same way and have the same benefits as low flow faucets. The [EPA](#) explains that toilets are the main source of water usage in the home and that inefficient toilets use as much as six gallons of water per flush. By upgrading to a low flush toilet, you can save 20 percent less water per flush (which still maintaining great performance). Like faucets, these toilets may have a WaterSense label, and there may be vouchers and rebates available that help to make these toilets more affordable.

## Additional Benefits of Low Flow Fixtures

If your old fixtures need to be replaced anyway, investing in low flow technology is a smart choice. Low flow technology will not only reduce the amount of wastewater that enters your septic system, helping to mitigate overflow but will also reduce your energy usage and related energy expenditures, which can save money. Overall, low flow features only have advantages, helping pad your wallet and save the earth.

## Other Things You Can Do to Prevent System Overload

In addition to changing your faucets, other things that you can do to prevent system overload include turning off the water when you’re brushing your teeth or washing your hands, reducing the time of your showers, and being more conscious of your water use when doing the dishes. We also discussed things like switching to energy efficient appliances in our other post. Small steps like this can truly help to preserve your septic system, cutting down on repairs and other issues in the future.



## Chapter 3: Septic Tank Maintenance

# DO NOT OVERLOAD YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM



The biggest reason that septic systems fail is that they are overloaded. Hydraulic overloading refers to a situation in which the amount of wastewater that is flowing into the system exceeds the system's designed flow rate. As a result, effective wastewater treatment is impaired. In addition to too much water coming in at once, there are a number of materials that can overload the system, many of which most homeowners find completely appropriate to put down the drain or flush down the toilet. Nothing should go down the toilet or drain with the exception of water, human waste, and toilet paper.

We've talked a lot thus far about reducing wastewater to prevent wastewater and **septic tank** overload. As a reminder, when a system is tasked with processing too much wastewater at once, its ability to properly treat the wastewater is hindered, which can result in bacterial contamination of nearby water sources, overflow and backup, and general wear and tear on a septic tank which decreases longevity and increases the risk of a problem that requires repairs.

But overload isn't just about the amount of water that enters a system although this does have a huge effect on septic health. Overload also refers to what enters the system.

## Septic Tanks Are for Human Waste and Water - That's It

Most people assume that just about anything can go down the drain, be ground up by the garbage disposal without issue, or be flushed down the toilet. However, this is far from true, and the more that you put down the drain or in the toilet, the more at risk of overload your septic system is. Not only are you risking clogs, but also things like bacterial overgrowth. Your septic system is designed to handle wastewater and human waste, but not much else. Indeed, **things that you should never put down the drain or flush down the toilet** include:

- Feminine hygiene products
- Paper towels
- Wipes, even those advertised as being “flushable”
- Cat litter
- Over-the-counter or prescription pharmaceuticals
- Diapers
- Floss or other hygiene products
- Coffee grounds
- Oils and grease
- Food
- Cigarette butts
- Cleaning products
- Chemical drain openers
- Any other hazardous materials or household chemicals.

Remember that everything that goes down the drain will end up in your septic system! As such, whatever goes in there will affect septic health. When you put toxins down the sink or in the toilet, you can kill the beneficial organisms that are responsible for digesting and treating household waste.

## **Signs of Septic System Overload**

Septic overload is probably one of the most common, if not the most common, septic system problems. It can easily be prevented by watching what you put into your septic system, and being conscious of the amount of wastewater you’re generating and that is entering your septic system at once. If you do have septic system overload, you will likely experience one or more of the following issues:

- Gurgling sound from drains
- Issues flushing the toilet (i.e. slow to flush, won’t flush)
- Water backup
- Lack of drainage
- Standing water in your yard
- Greener patches of grass in your yard (these areas are extra fertilized as a result of wastewater!)
- Bad, sewage-like odors.

If you think that your septic system is overloaded, you should seek professional help immediately to avoid the problem growing and potentially being catastrophic.

In terms of septic tank maintenance, just remember that nothing should go down the kitchen sink except for water and a mild dish soap and that nothing should go down the toilet with the exception of human waste and toilet paper. Removing a kitchen sink disposal may be a helpful way to remember this.

## Chapter 4: Septic Tank Maintenance

## BE AWARE OF PEAK WATER TIMES AND PLAN ACCORDINGLY

Most homeowners use the majority of water in the morning and at night, using water to make breakfast or dinner, wash the dishes, shower, and use the toilet. Because these are prime water use times in most households, make sure you plan for other water use needs, like running a load of laundry, at another time throughout the day. For example, do not use the shower, run the dishwasher, and run the laundry machine all at once - this leads to septic system hydraulic overload.



One of the most important things that you can do to help maintain the health of your **septic system** is to be aware of your family's peak water times and to run other wastewater-generating appliances at a different time of day as such. These are both key actions to take for septic tank maintenance.

### What Are Peak Water Use Times?

Peak water use times refer to the times of day that your family tends to use the most water. Most families use the most water in the early morning and in the evening, typically using water to shower, flush the toilet, run a bath for the kids, cook dinner, etc. During the middle of the day, water usage is much lower, in large part because many people are not in the home, but instead at work.

However, peak water use times can vary from person-to-person and family to family. Take a few days to document your family's water use - at what time(s) of day is your family using the most water?

### Preventing Septic Overload

Once you are aware of when your family tends to use the most water, you can implement a schedule where other home water needs, like watering the lawn, running the dishwasher, or using the clothes washing machine take place at different times. Remember, when you generate a lot of wastewater at once-i.e. flush the toilet, run the shower, and then start the washing machine back-to-back or at the same time-your septic system is at risk of overload, which prevents it from being able to effectively treat wastewater and decreases system longevity. In some cases, spacing out water use needs

may require only doing laundry on the weekends, coming home midway during the day to start the dishwasher, and other creative solutions.

## **Putting in Place a Plan for Your Family**

Maintaining your septic system and preventing overload has to be a goal that the whole family is behind. You may be committed to not flushing the toilet and running the shower at the same time, but if other members of your family are not on board, your efforts may be futile. Schedule a family meeting to discuss your family's water use. During the meeting, you can and should discuss:

- What septic tank overload is and why mitigating it is important
- Your family's peak water use times
- What systems in your home use water
- The development of a schedule for showering/bathing, running water-using appliances, etc.
- Other things that your family can do to improve septic health, like cutting down on the amount of water you use (taking shorter showers, turning off the sink while you're brushing your teeth, only flushing the toilet when necessary, etc.) and being conscious of what you put down your drains and toilets (only toilet paper and human waste should enter your septic system!).

You can also discuss some of the signs of a septic problem, and what family members should do if there are signs of septic overload.

## **Working with a Septic Professional Can Help**

Knowing what things to do to maintain the health of your septic system can seem complicated and confusing – who knew that you shouldn't use chemical solutions to clear clogged drains, that a garbage disposal can do more harm than good, or that "flushable" wipes aren't really flushable?

More than maintenance alone, though, knowing what to do if you are experiencing a septic problem, such as overload, can also be confusing. Maintenance can only get you so far; if it's too late for maintenance and a septic problem occurs, taking action to alleviate the problem as soon as possible is important. When problems are not addressed, they can lead to catastrophic results, including flooding. Septic flooding, which means that sewage is in your yard or home, is something that no one wants to deal with.

At ABC Pumping Services, we offer the septic maintenance and emergency services that you can count on, including pumping, tank cleaning, drainfield services, and more. We help you to maintain the health of your septic system to avoid issues and provide the fast and effective services you need if a problem does arise.

If you have a septic tank that hasn't been pumped in recent memory, or if you have questions about septic health or suspect septic tank problems, please contact us today. You can [request an appointment online](#), or call us at 208-954-5339 today.



## Chapter 5: Septic Tank Maintenance

# INCREASING THE LEVEL OF SOLIDS IN YOUR SEPTIC TANK DECREASES TANK CAPACITY



If you want to extend the life of your septic tank and decrease the frequency with which septic tank pumpings are necessary, the answer lies, in part, in reducing the number of solids that enter your septic tank. This is because the more solids that enter your tank, the bigger the reduction in tank capacity, and the shorter the interval between necessary pumpings. Here's what you need to know about how solids affect septic tank health, what happens when solids enter your septic tank, and how you can reduce the number of solids that enter your septic system.

When solids and wastewater enter the septic tank, the solids and wastewater are separated. Heavier, denser solids will settle to the bottom of the tank, and lighter solids (like grease) will float to the top. The problem with solids is clear: the more solids that accumulate, the greater the risk of a clog. Further, if solid accumulation is rapid, the tank will have to be pumped more frequently. If too many solids accumulate in the tank, the tank will not function properly, and proper solid separation will not occur. As such, solids will actually wash out of the septic tank, eventually clogging the soil treatment area. This means septic system failure, a big mess, and a large expense.

## **The Number of Solids That Enter Your Tank Affects the Frequency of Septic Tank Pumping**

Most organizations, including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), recommend that the average owner of a septic system invest in septic system draining and cleaning every three to five years. However, this time frame is largely dependent upon the number of solids that enter your tank, which is affected by things like the number of people in your home, and what you put down the drain. If you have a large family and there are few

guidelines in place about what should go down the drain, you may need to pump your tank more frequently. If there are fewer people in your home and you're all extremely conscious about what you let enter your septic system, pumpings and cleanings will be needed much less frequently.

## **Reducing the Number of Solids that Enter Your Septic System**

As should be clear from the information above, a key part of preserving the health of your septic system is reducing the number of solids that enter your septic tank. Some tips for doing so include:

- Eliminate the use of the garbage disposal. The [EPA](#) explains that when you stop using your garbage disposal, you can reduce the amount of grease, fat, and solids that enter the septic tank and potentially clog the drainfield.
- Don't put food down the sink. If you don't have a garbage disposal or are trying to limit its use, you'll quickly find out that this means that you don't want to put any food down the sink (which will quickly clog your pipes when not ground up with a disposal). However, disposal or not, food waste is solid, and by limiting the amount of food waste that enters your system, you'll limit the amount of overall solids in your septic tank.
- Know what should go down the drain – and what shouldn't. Essentially, the only things that should go down the drain or be flushed down the toilet are toilet paper, human waste, and water. Anything else, both solid and liquid alike, can cause serious problems for your septic tank.

Finally, another must-do for combatting solids is to make sure you are having your septic system drained at a frequency that is appropriate for the number of solids that are entering the system.

## Chapter 6: Septic Tank Maintenance

# DO NOT POUR FATS AND OILS DOWN THE DRAIN

Septic tank maintenance takes a lot of work, and there are many things that you should do and avoid doing to keep it in tiptop condition. On the list of things that you should never do is this: do not pour fats and oils down the drain, as doing so can clog your septic tank pipes.

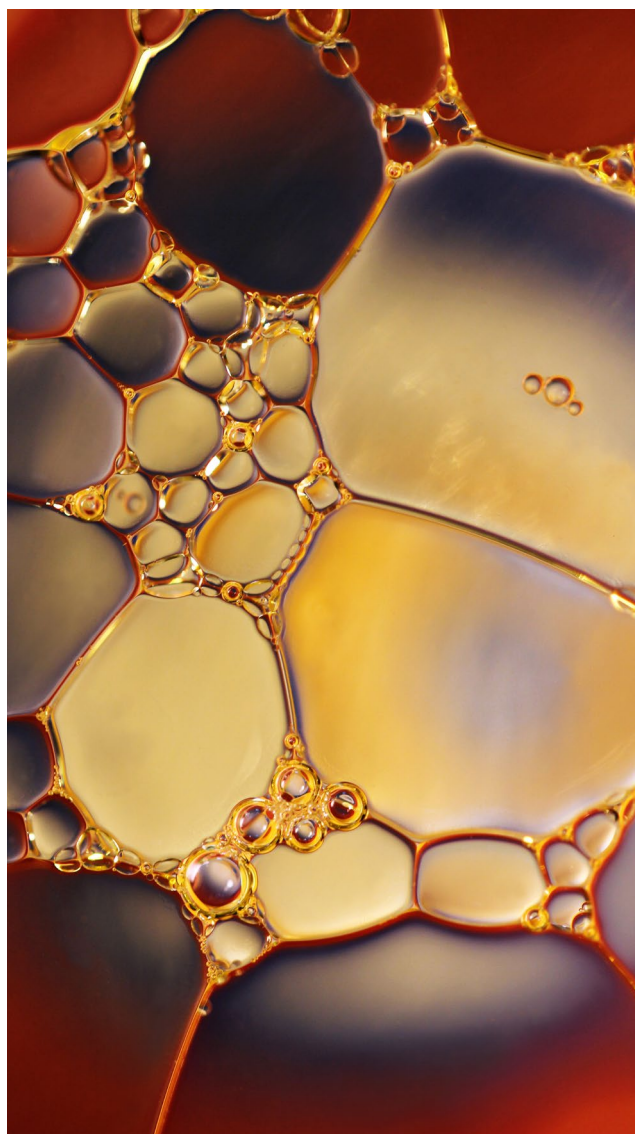
You should avoid putting all types of fats and oils in the drain; if you have fats and oils in your home, such as bacon grease after cooking breakfast on a Saturday morning, you should **compost the fat**, save it in a mason jar to use for cooking in the future, or put in in the trash. Fats and oils include all types of fats and oils, including:

- Canola oil
- Sunflower or safflower oil
- Coconut oil
- Avocado oil
- Fat remnants from cooking pork or beef
- Cheese
- High-fat dairy products, like cream, butter, or whole milk
- Grease and cooking fat
- Nut butters
- All other cooking oils.

## What Happens When Fats and Oils Are Put Down the Drain?

When fats and oils are put down the drain, the biggest concern is that of a clog. An article published by **Business Insider** does a great job explaining what happens when fats and oils are poured down the sink.

The grease and the oil go down the sink and head down your pipes into the septic system. There (assuming they make it to the septic tank without getting stuck in the pipes, first, a very common problem) they come in contact with wastewater. Then,



the fats and oils get broken down into their component parts – fatty acids and glycerol. The fatty acids bind to calcium found within the septic system, creating a thick, globular compound. Sometimes called “fatbergs,” these compounds block the pipes and cause serious drainage issues. In fact, it is estimated that fat and oil buildups cause a whopping 47 percent of sewage overflows in the United States that occur annually (there are about 36,000 incidents reported per year).

## **How to Remove Fat and Grease When a Blockage Occurs**

If fat and oil have gone down the drain and a blockage occurs, what steps you should take next depend on the severity of the problem. If only a little grease has escaped into the sink, you may be able to remedy the problem by pouring boiling water down the drain. If the problem is more severe, removing the pipes under your kitchen sink and cleaning them out may be necessary. And for really severe grease and fat blockages, especially if your septic system has been affected, calling in the professionals is a must.

The best way to combat a blockage is to avoid the problem in the first place by always disposing of fat and grease responsibly. And remember, fat and grease aren’t the only things that you shouldn’t put down the drain; nearly all food products should be tossed or composted instead of entering your septic system.



## Chapter 7: Septic Tank Maintenance

## DO NOT USE A GARBAGE DISPOSAL OR DUMP COFFEE GROUNDS INTO THE SINK



Homeowners with a septic system probably already know that should a septic tank backup, clog, or spillover occur, the results can be disastrous, resulting in a huge mess and a lot of money to remedy. Which is why those who rely on a septic system are likely very interested in doing everything they can to perform basic septic tank maintenance in order to mitigate an incident. As discussed in another post, one thing that can negatively affect the health of your septic system is a high level of solid accumulation. In order

to reduce the number of solids that wind up in your septic tank, you should avoid using a garbage disposal and putting any food, including coffee grounds, into your sink...CLOSE

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) does a great job explaining the problem with garbage disposals in their "[A Homeowner's Guide to Septic Systems](#)" publication. The job of a garbage disposal is to grind up food scraps, which may seemingly appear like a good thing. However, ground up scraps are solids, and can accumulate in the tank, increasing the frequency with which tank pumping is necessary. What's more, the use of a garbage disposal may also contribute to the amount of grease and other solids that enter the septic tank, potentially clogging the drainfield. If homeowners know that grinding up food scraps isn't an option, they are more likely to find alternative methods of disposal (thank goodness).

### The Problem with Coffee Grounds

The problem with coffee grounds is the same issue with all food scraps: they contribute to clogs. In fact, coffee grounds are associated with a large percentage of blockages, and have been likened to cement in pipes.

### What to Do with Food and Coffee Grounds Instead

Most people put food waste and coffee grounds into the sink because it is the most convenient method of disposal, and because they're not sure what to do with food waste and coffee grounds otherwise. However, remember that the more food and coffee

grounds that enter the system, the more you better be willing to shell out big bucks for frequent septic system drainings and pipe clearings; this should be a deterrent.

Instead of putting coffee grounds and food down the drain—which will only cause problems—you can actually compost nearly all food waste, and coffee grounds, and turn your waste into something productive. If you have a garden, coffee grounds can be applied directly to the soil – your plants will love it! If you don't, your city may support a composting operation where they will pick up your compost, or you can drop it off at a compost center. If you're daring, you can even try an at-home compost, creating a compost pile in your backyard, or using worms to help you create an efficient **vermicompost system**.

If composting isn't an option for you, throw your coffee grounds and food scraps in the trash. In no situation should these things ever be put down your sink; you'll only be creating more stress for yourself at a later point.

## Chapter 8: Septic Tank Maintenance

# PUT TRASH IN THE TRASH CAN; NOT IN THE TOILET



Most Americans don't think much about where their trash goes. Indeed, when something needs to be disposed of quickly--particularly items related to personal hygiene--they are often flushed down the toilet rather than thrown out in the trash or recycled. While most people would assume that doing this is a relatively harmless way to get rid of trash, the truth is that it can lead to major septic problems, not to mention pollution and contamination of water sources. Indeed, you should never put trash in the toilet; trash should be properly disposed of in the trash can, or recycled or composted.

## Common Things People Put Down the Toilet But Shouldn't

There are a number of common items that people put down the toilet that don't belong there. This includes:

- Flushable wipes
- Baby wipes
- Tampons
- Sanitary pads
- Floss
- Kitty litter

- Hair
- Household chemicals and cleaners, including bleach
- Medications
- Cigarettes
- Condoms
- Gum
- Food
- Paper towels
- Cotton balls/q-tips
- Wrappers and plastic
- Make-up
- Fish and other tiny critters (often dead).

The only things that should be flushed down the toilet are human waste and toilet paper. All other items should be disposed of in another manner.

## What's the Harm in Flushing Things Down the Toilet?

Flushing things down the toilet may sound pretty harmless, but it can cause a lot of damage to your septic system. Remember, increasing the level of solids in your tank decreases tank capacity, so you should do everything you can to reduce the number of solids that enter your tank.

But it's not just solids that can have a negative effect on your septic tank and the environment, including the cleanliness of water. For example, when medication—either prescription, over the counter, or illegal—is flushed, it can enter streams and rivers, actually contaminating ecosystems and potentially entering drinking water. The same is true of household chemicals. Further, some substances can disturb the bacteria, including the good bacteria, living within your septic system, leading to problems.

## What to Do with Trash Instead

Even if something says that it is flushable, such as wipes that claim to be flushable, the trash is a better option. If you're not sure how to dispose of something, **such as your prescription medications**, safely, look it up online. For the most part, however, the trash is a better option. If you want to be even more conscious, you can try to reduce the amount of trash that you generate by committing to a plastic-free lifestyle, using compostable products, and using washable cloths and rags instead of paper towels. Of course, living completely trash free would be difficult if not impossible, but you can do your part by responsibly disposing of items rather than putting them down the toilet in an effort to help with **septic tank maintenance**. Keep in mind that the same goes for the garbage disposal; don't put things down the sink that don't belong there, including food!



## Chapter 9: Septic Tank Maintenance

## USE MODERATE AMOUNTS OF CLEANING PRODUCTS



There are countless areas of your home that require cleaning on regular basis, ranging from your kitchen to your bathroom to your laundry room, bedroom, living room, and more. Cleaning these areas of your homes--not to mention your home's exterior--often means investing in cleaning products, such as window cleaner, oven cleaner, furniture polish, bleach, ammonia, floor cleaner, and more.

While you may not think twice about heading to your local supermarket to purchase these products, and then using them liberally within your home, cleaning products can be both dangerous for your health and bad for your septic system. Here's what you need to know regarding these products and septic tank maintenance.

### The Problem With Home Cleaning Products

The problem with home cleaning products is that many contain ingredients that are hazardous for human health. For example, phosphates, chlorine, and other toxins can get into the water system, disrupting ecosystems and even endangering human health. They can also cause problems in your septic system by disrupting levels of bacteria, including good bacteria, that are necessary for septic health.

### How to Dispose of Home Cleaning Products

The best solution to reducing the number of home cleaning products that enter your septic system is simply to reduce the number of home cleaning products you use (alternative cleaning product ideas listed below). However, if you cannot cut ties with bleach or other hazardous materials, it is important that at the very least, you know how to dispose of them properly. The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) recommends that you check with your local environmental or solid waste agency for information about disposal of Hazardous Household Waste (HHW), as some communities have a collection center in place. You may also be able to drop off products at a local business for property disposal or recycling. This is not limited to just household cleaning products, but also things like paints, batteries, and pesticides, too.

## **Alternatives to Chemical Cleaners in the Home**

Continuing to use chemical cleaners in your home just isn't worth it. Study after study highlights the dangers of these chemicals and the effects on human health, and when these chemicals are flushed or poured down the drain, they have the potential to negatively impact and contaminate streams, rivers, lakes, and drinking water. If you want to preserve your health and the health of your septic system, it's time to make a change.

Some great natural cleaners that are safer to use include citrus, vinegar, castile soap, natural salt, baking soda, and even hydrogen peroxide. A quick search online provides numerous suggestions for creating safe household cleaners. There are also a number of safer, chemical-free cleaners for purchase in most grocery stores.

## **Protect Your Health and Your Septic System**

The last thing that you want to do as a homeowner with a septic system is to disturb good bacteria with your septic system or do something to decrease the longevity of your septic system. To extend the life of your septic system and reduce the amount of servicing your septic system requires, refrain from putting household cleaning products down the drain.

## Chapter 10: Septic Tank Maintenance

# AVOID DUMPING SOLVENTS DOWN THE DRAIN

Preserving and extending the life of your septic system is an important consideration; the less you care for your septic system and the more ignorant you are about how to keep it in good shape, the more money you will likely spend on it over time. What's more, failure to keep your septic system in working order can lead to overflow and flooding, a truly disastrous event.

While many homeowners know that they shouldn't flush trash and that limiting water use as much as possible is important, most don't think twice about what they put down the drain or flush. In addition to household cleaning products and trash, other things that should never enter your septic system are solvents.

## Solvents - What're Those?

Solvents are liquid chemicals that are used to dissolve solid materials. There are both natural and chemical solvents, but as **one publication states**, "there are no 'safe' solvents."

Solvents are known to be dangerous to the environment and hazardous to human health. Indeed, solvents can irritate and damage membranes in the nose, throat, and eyes; can cause skin irritation and burns; and can even cause chemical pneumonia and death! Solvents also disrupt ecosystems, making them bad for plants, animals, and even microscopic bacteria.

## Common Household Solvents

You may be thinking, "I don't have any solvents in my home! What do I own that is used to dissolve solid materials?" You may be surprised; the list of common household solvents is shockingly long, and contains items such as:

- Paint thinner
- Nail polish remover
- Degreasers
- Lubricating oils
- Fuels
- Drain cleaner
- Turpentine
- Furniture stripper



The list continues – in fact, solvents may be found in things like spot removers and carpet cleaners, furniture polish, paint, glues, shoe care products, and more. If you're not sure if something is a solvent, you may be able to recognize it by the following characteristics:

- Strong smell – solvents often smell like gas or kerosene
- Labeled as “flammable”
- Labeled with a warning about inhalation of vapors
- The product evaporates or hardens quickly after application (such as a polish).

## What to Do with Your Solvents

You should never put solvents down the drain, regardless of whether you have a septic tank or not. However, if you have a septic system, it's important to know that wastewater that enters your septic system is transferred to a drain field, where bacteria in the wastewater is broken down. If there are **toxic materials in that wastewater**, the natural process will be disrupted. What's more, some toxic materials may enter the soil, contaminating ground or surface water and presenting a risk to human health, and the health of the ecosystems where the toxins reach.

Instead of dumping solvents down the drain, you should contact your local waste agency to learn more about proper disposal or recycling of household hazardous waste. However, the best way to avoid a problem is to start with prevention, which means limiting your purchase of solvents and buying only what you need. You can also try to buy less hazardous products when possible, and use a plumber's snake or a plunger to alleviate clogs in drains and the toilet rather than using chemical drain cleaners.

## Be Smart About Your Septic System

**Septic tank maintenance** requires a conscious effort. The good news is that most smart decisions you make for your septic system, such as preserving water, composting your food rather than putting it down the disposal, and keeping chemicals and solvents out of your drains and toilet, are not only good for your septic system, but good for the earth, your health, or both.

In addition to prevention techniques like those discussed above, it is also important to have your septic tank pumped and serviced on a regular basis to ensure that it is kept in good condition; it is easier to avoid a problem than to clean one up!

For all of the septic services you could need in Idaho, our team at ABC Pumping Services is here to help. We provide septic services for both residential homeowners and business owners, and our services including maintaining and repairing drain fields, repairing irrigation vaults, cesspool and septic tank pumping, liquid waste hauling, sumps pumping, and more.

To schedule an appointment or ask more questions today, please contact us at 208-954-5339. You can also **request an appointment online**. We have the experience you're looking for, and provide preventative and emergency services.





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