

Fast Facts

The following septic tank information is delivered to you courtesy of **Rockyview Aqua Ltd** and **Cochrane Septic**, your Rockyview resident specialists.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM

1. Septic system problems and emergencies arise in both new and old homes due to the following:
 - a. Poor or improper installation by contractors pertaining to:
 - Non-compliance to specific provincial code requirements and recommended techniques
 - Improper use and installation of non-septic type pumps, improper wiring and no high septic level alarm.
 - b. Septic contractors not providing homeowners accurate information on septic system maintenance and cleaning frequency. Some installation contractors have been known to provide absolute miss-information I.e.; "When I install a septic system, it never has to be cleaned out." It is the same type of contractors that locate septic tanks where they are not reasonably accessible resulting in long term inconvenience for the homeowner.
 - c. Homeowner procrastination in cleaning will typically result in pump failure and/or sludge plugging up the septic field. A deteriorated septic tank will cause the same effect.
2. Minor amounts of grease, home cleaning products, water based paint clean-ups and garborated organics will not adversely affect the conditions within the septic tank. Avoid harsh chemicals in certain cleaning products, oil based paint clean-ups, chlorine (bleach) and such products as they will kill any bacteria residing in the septic tank. Spread out laundering throughout the week.
3. It is not a good idea to plant conifers or deciduous trees on or near the septic field, the roots over time, will infiltrate the field and plug off the perforated laterals that distribute the effluent.
4. Do not allow any heavy equipment onto the septic field during any period the ground is not frozen.
5. Avoid livestock, vehicular traffic, built-up planters, out buildings, trailer parking, skating rinks, ponds, driveways etc. on any area of the septic field.
6. Septic field maintenance requires the grass be regularly cut and excess thatch removed.
7. Controlling subsoil rodents such as the pocket gopher will be necessary.
8. Keep your septic tank lid accessible. Do not bury or build enclosures around the lid whereby one person (septic cleaning contractor) could not reasonably slide off the heavy concrete lid.
9. If your lawn is subject to damage from septic truck tire tracking, consider having your septic tank cleaned in winter, when the ground is frozen, Weather conditions, tank access and ground slope may limit this opportunity. Early winter or early springs are usually good periods.

10. If you have a shallow bury septic tank, that is, your tank is within 18 inches of the surface, it may be subject to freezing. It is recommended you have the tank cleaned in spring to allow sludge to build up before winter, resulting in a warmer tank. Also, if you holiday late in winter and nobody will be in the home, have someone run some 20 gallons of hot water every couple of days to keep the septic system from freezing up.
11. Septic odors may be an indicator your septic tank has gone dead (toxic) usually from inadequate cleaning. The sludge in the tank may turn black and give off a bad odor. Other reasons for odor in the home may be the septic tank is flooded and the home has lost the normal venting system to the roof or the basement floor drain has dried out, in which case it simply requires some fresh water.
12. It is futile for the homeowner to check the loading conditions of their septic tank as the majority of sludge builds from the bottom up and the floating scum layer (if any) is not an accurate indicator of loading conditions. Furthermore the accumulating sludge in the gray water (clean) chamber is not evident on the surface. The pumping technician should accurately assess the tank loading factor.
13. If a water softener is required, get a water metering type installed that only regenerates as necessary via a time clock model that automatically regenerates based on time i.e. every 2nd or 3rd day. The excessive water/salt use time clock models have been outlawed in some US states.
14. If iron filtration is required, consider a large unit and in most cases one that uses "potassium permanganate" which may only need regenerating once per week as compared to some daily regeneration units.
15. The addition of bacteria enhancing products are not of good value as a septic tank receiving influent from a treated water supply containing chlorine (bleach) continually suppresses the reproduction of bacteria. A septic system on well water and no chlorine from home use will be in excellent condition with a vigorous bacteria community already existing in the tank without additives. High volume water usage is a limiting factor to bacteria reproduction in any tank as contact and retention time is limited.
16. If not originally provided, consider an early warning, high level, septic tank alarm for a septic system with a pump. The early warning alarm warns the homeowner of a pending sewer back up (potential disaster). Contrary to misinformation provided by some contractors, the septic alarm is not there to tell you it is time to clean your tank. Check with your home insurance agent regarding "SEWER BACK-UP".
17. If your septic pump should fail, have it replaced with a high quality pump such as a "GOULDS", there are many cheap and mediocre pumps that are de-watering pumps and should not be used in a corrosive septic application. The risk from sewer back-up is not worth it.
18. If you require a new septic system, it is strongly recommended you employ a reputable septic installation contractor who makes his living doing proper permitted systems. Call me for references.
19. Septic tank cleaning frequency depends on mainly four factors:
 - 1) Size of tank: 500, 700, 1000 or 2000 gallons

- 2) Number of occupants in the home
- 3) Garborator usage
- 4) Chlorine treated or well water source

Typical cleaning frequency ranges from six months to two years.

20. The issue of complacency deserves special mention. I get so many calls on septic problems, mainly sewer back-ups and failed septic fields. I always ask the same question. *What has been the frequency of septic tank cleaning?* More often than not, the answer is *it's been quite a few years or I have never had it cleaned.* I always ask *Why not?* The answer not surprising is usually *I have never had a problem.* I am absolutely astonished, given the general high caliber of people living here, that they must know the value of preventive maintenance. While I'm sure dental, vehicular and other maintenance items get attended to, these same folks will overlook the necessity to remove the accumulated sludge built up in their septic tank before it obstructs the pump or siphon and ruins the septic field. This point cannot be emphasized enough given the likely hood many smaller acreage properties do not have the area for a new septic field. The cost of replacing a septic field is around \$8,000.00. The rationale for having your septic tank cleaned regularly is obvious. We keep our customers on a programmed maintenance system whereby you are called when your system is due for cleaning. Please stay on schedule, it helps us reduce repeated call backs and allows us to schedule our work load.
21. Although not widely known, nor publicized, all septic solids get applied onto local agricultural lands. This is being done by the city of Calgary's company "CALGRO" and private septic haulers.
22. While farmers may appreciate the nutrient and irrigation value of septage, they cannot tolerate contaminants such as feminine hygiene products, condoms and various other non-biodegradables. Virtually all rural homeowners know not to put these contaminants into a septic system knowing these products are not compatible with the bio-digestion that's fundamental to the operation of a septic system not to mention the potential damage to a pump or the septic field. Occasionally a homeowner has not been made aware of these criteria or could care less. Please be environmentally friendly.

It is hoped this information provides the homeowner with an understanding of the importance of maintaining a properly functioning septic system very necessary to your home.