
Decentralized Wastewater Systems: Tips for Homeowners

Decentralized wastewater treatment systems are stand-alone wastewater systems that are not connected to city sewer. These systems are capable of treating wastewater to levels that meet or exceed the effluent quality of municipal wastewater treatment systems. An important distinction between municipal and decentralized systems is that they are designed for different types of wastewater. Municipal treatment systems are specially designed to treat large wastewater flows and high-strength (i.e. restaurant) wastewater. Your decentralized treatment system, on the other hand, was only designed to treat the wastewater generated by the homes in your community. Because decentralized wastewater treatment systems are small, homeowners need to be careful about what they discharge to their wastewater system. **Poor disposal practices increase the strength of wastewater entering your treatment system and can result in increased costs for system maintenance and repair.** Discharging household chemicals to your treatment system can cause excessive wear and tear to your system and, eventually requires more rapid replacement.

To minimize maintenance and repair costs for homeowners, EcoCheck wants to educate users on how to efficiently use their wastewater system. Below are water use tips developed from EcoCheck and the University of Minnesota's Onsite Sewage Treatment Program for users of decentralized wastewater treatment systems:

- Do not discharge household waste products to the system. This includes even small amounts of latex paint rinsed off rollers or brushes. Because these chemicals kill the bacteria in septic tanks, dispose of all solvents, paints and chemicals through local recycling and hazardous waste collection sites. Consult your local solid waste officials for proper disposal methods.
- Iron filters and water softeners should be removed from the wastewater system discharge.
- Do not discharge chlorine-treated water from swimming pools and hot-tubs to the wastewater system.
- Use your garbage disposal sparingly. Vegetables, meat, fat, oils, and other food products create large amounts of sludge, which results in more frequent septic tank cleaning. Additionally, these food materials are difficult for bacteria in the septic tank to break down.
- If you want to add a garbage disposal, water softener or iron filter to your existing home, consult your Homeowners Association and operator before it is installed. Adding one of these appliances without notification can result in treatment system complications and potential permit compliance issues.
- Minimize the amount of hair, grease, and solid material that go down your drain. Do not flush facial tissue, paper towels, cigarette butts, disposable diapers, condoms or personal hygiene products. These items can clog pumps and cause excessive service calls.
- Do not use 'every flush' toilet bowl cleaners.
- Use bleaches and household cleaners sparingly.
- Minimize the use of antibacterial cleaning products, as these products stress the bacteria in your treatment system.
- Do not discharge expired medications down the toilet or pour them down the drain. They will kill beneficial bacteria in the wastewater system.
- If you are taking certain strong medications, such as chemotherapy drugs, increased maintenance of your system may be required. Strong medications affect the bacterial activity in the septic tank and operational adjustments are necessary. If you are taking strong medication please inform your operator or manager of the system.