

Septic 101

My guess is that most new residents in Montgomery County are new to the whole “septic system” experience. Your builder probably handled getting the septic designed, the permits, picking your system, having the system installed and maintained-- “out of sight, out of mind”, right? Did your builder explain the State laws and regulations for your septic system? Did your maintenance provider schedule a meeting with you after closing to go over the system and explain how your system works and your responsibility as the property owner? Just in case, here is a refresher course-- Septic 101:

Montgomery County Health Services’ Environmental division is responsible to the state, as the permitting authority for legal installation and maintenance of septic systems. Before you can build, you must have a professional engineer or Registered Sanitarian do a soil analysis and design your septic system based on the square footage of the home, number of bedrooms (if it has a closet, it’s a bedroom) and the number of people in some cases, the design along with the soil analysis and site evaluation must be submitted to the county for approval, once the paper work is approved you receive your building and septic permit. You will not be able to get your building permit without your septic permit.

State law requires the Installer to be licensed with the state as well as be a certified maintenance provider, or work with a maintenance company that is state certified, to include a two year maintenance agreement with the installation, after that it is up to the property owner to obtain a yearly maintenance contract.

The law requires that your maintenance company inspect and maintain your “Aerobic” system by inspecting the system a minimum of three times per year (once every four month’s). A BOD or a TSS grab sample should be performed once per year. A copy of the results from all inspections is given to the homeowner and a copy is sent to the County to keep on file.

After two years, it is the homeowner’s responsibility to contract a company to maintain their septic system. Be sure that your maintenance company is a state certified maintenance provider and is certified by the manufacturer of your system.

If you do renovations to your home that increases your water usage or changes the footprint of your structure, or if you add a swimming pool, or storage building, you may need to get a new septic design and an “add on permit” from the county. For instance, the diameter of the outside spray area of your system must be 25 feet from your swimming pool. So you may need to move your existing spray heads. If you have a landscaping company install a sprinkler system you need to make sure it does not interfere with the septic system. Under no circumstances can a landscaping company replace septic spray heads with theirs. Septic sprinklers are by state law, required to be purple so that it is obvious that they are used for sewage

So, what happens if you don't have a maintenance contract? Or what if you had a contractor but the company never performed the State inspections? You could receive a citation from the County and be fined as much as \$500 dollars a day. How would the County find out that you haven't maintained your system? Well, it wouldn't take long for everyone to know. The smell would give you away. Or your neighbor may notice that your spray heads are spraying the day and your alarm will be going off and annoying your neighbors. Many things could happen that would alert you and your neighbors that there is a problem. If the County is contacted with a complaint, they will look up your reports and contact your maintenance provider to go out and check your system. If the county discovers that you don't have a maintenance provider, then the homeowner is given ten days to sign a maintenance contract and fix the problem. If not, the homeowner is given a citation and fined \$500 per day until the problem is resolved. The County also does random maintenance checks. They will randomly pick an area and send out agents to check each home in that area. The agent will check your system to be sure that the maintenance tag is up-to-date. If they suspect a problem with your system, they may turn the system on to make sure it operates properly.

Maintenance companies are required to bring repair issues, such as a broken sprinkler head or pump, to the attention of the homeowner. The law requires that homeowners pay for the repair. If the homeowner refuses, the maintenance company must alert the County, who in turn sends out a 30 day notice to the homeowner to make the repair. A Citation will be written if the problem is not corrected.

Last but not least, Chlorine tablets are required to be routinely administered to your septic system. Based on the usage of your system, you may need to add tablets monthly. Chlorine tablets are the responsibility of the homeowner. Chlorine tablets for sewage and liquid chlorinators which use household bleach are the only approved methods for the treatment of the bacteria in sewage.

Many of you may not realize that an Aerobic Wastewater Treatment Plant is a "living" machine that houses a micro-organism "bug colony" that consumes organic waste. These micro-organisms require oxygen and appropriate "food" (organic waste devoid of toxins) to survive. The following "do's" and "don't" should be practiced to insure your system performs properly.

- Medicines: If anyone in your household is ingesting strong medicines; antibiotics, chemotherapy or other, the health of your "bug colony" may be jeopardized.
- Do not dispose of grease, fats, and oils.
- Do not dispose of pesticides, herbicides and other toxins.
- The garbage disposal should be used sparingly. Food waste, grease, etc. should be disposed of in the solid waste bin. Food waste represents additional loading the Aerobic Treatment Unit would have to digest increasing pump out intervals.
- Do not dispose of paints, household chemicals, automobile fluids, or discard mop water into the system.

- Do not dispose of no-biodegradable items such as cigarette butts, disposable diapers, feminine hygiene products, condoms, hair, coffee grounds, paper towels, bandages, etc.
- Wash loads must be spread out over the week. More than one wash load a day is not recommended. Never use laundry detergents with “built-on” bleach.
- Do not dispose of citrus products.
- Do not use drain cleaners or additives for septic systems like Rid-X of similar products.
- Do not connect other water sources to the system.
- Water softener discharge kills the micro-organisms in your wastewater treatment system.
- Do not dispose of alcoholic beverages or home brewery waste.
- Do not dispose of strong disinfectants or bleaches, such as “Clorox”, “Lysol” or “Pine-sol”. Anti-bacterial soaps should be avoided.
- Never use automatic toilet bowl cleaning dispensers.
- Recommended detergents should be low sudsing, low in phosphates, and biodegradable, with washing soda ingredients. Fabric softener dryer sheets are recommended.
- Recommended cleaning products are non-chlorine, biodegradable, non-toxic, and non-corrosive.

If you have any questions, need additional information, would like to file a complaint, or need a list of certified maintenance companies, you can contact the Montgomery County Health Services department at 936-539-7839.