

Hay Lake Town Homes Association
Septic Systems Care
Updated September 19, 2014

Septic systems consist of two major components – the tank and the drain field. The purpose of the tank is to collect all solids and liquids from toilets and drains. The solids sink to the bottom of the tank and decompose with their natural bacteria into a sludge. The liquids rise to the top and flow into the drain field. Tank sludge is pumped at regular intervals to prevent the tank from overflowing and introducing solids into the drain field. The drain field, which is a series of distribution tubes containing hundreds of weep holes, distributes the liquids into layers of gravel and sand and then into the soil. While septic tanks almost never fail, drain fields are vulnerable if solids of any sort are introduced and the weep holes become plugged. Proper drainage is then inhibited and backups/total failure can occur. A non-functional drain field cannot be repaired and must be relocated at high expense. To ensure the proper operation and long life of our septic systems, please follow these guidelines:

1. No food, garbage, paper, oils or fats in toilets or drains. This includes coffee grounds and any other food preparation by-products.
2. No sanitary napkins, tampons, condoms, disposable diapers, paper towels or cigarette butts in toilets. Only toilet paper is acceptable in toilets. Try to limit the amount of hair as well.
3. Use only sparing amounts of **liquid** laundry and dish washing detergents. No bleaches or detergents should be used.
4. Space out showers and laundry loads so as not to run large amounts of water to the septic system in a short period. This can cause a disruption in the normal settling process within the tank and result in solids flowing into the drain field.
5. Avoid “every flush” toilet bowl disinfectants and other antibacterial products as they kill naturally occurring good bacteria necessary to proper septic tank function.
6. Use sparing amounts of toilet bowl cleaner.
7. Garbage disposals are not allowed.
8. Hazardous materials, chemicals or paint of any kind should not be placed in drains.
9. Do not dispose of unwanted medications in toilets or drains.
10. Consider installing a lint trap in the washing machine discharge hose. Lint can be a major contributor to drain field failure.

Winter Freeze Precautions

Septic system freezing can occur in extremely cold weather especially when there is little snow cover. This is seldom harmful to the system but it can cause sewer backups. To help avoid this:

1. Stay off the entire lake-side yard area in winter to avoid packing the snow. Packed snow has a much lower insulating effect.
2. Be sure that there are no leaking faucets or toilets as trickling water will tend to freeze in the system. See the Winter Tips document for instructions on detecting leaking toilets.
3. Insulating cement blankets can be used to help prevent sewer line freeze ups where the lines exit the buildings as there can be insufficient snow cover in these areas.

Note: Additional suggestions on septic care and freeze-up remedies can be found on the U of Minnesota web site: <http://septic.umn.edu/factsheets/freezingproblems/>

