



Hamilton Watershed Stewardship Program

A Program of:



Who are we?

The **Hamilton Watershed Stewardship Program** is a program of Hamilton Conservation Authority that works with private landowners to protect, enhance and restore the environmentally significant natural areas and watercourses on their property.

We have been working with landowners in the Hamilton watershed since 1994. We provide advice and make recommendations for environmentally friendly land use practices on properties with natural features, such as woodlots, wetlands, meadows, ravines and creeks.

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Is Your Septic System Functioning Properly?

Ever thought of what happens after you flush?

Poorly maintained septic systems can be potentially dangerous and widespread sources of groundwater contamination. In order to prevent ground water contamination, owners of septic systems need to understand what is involved in proper septic system care. All septic system owners should be familiar with basic system components, system operation and maintenance, signs and remedies of system failure, and alternative septic systems.

Warning signs that your septic system is failing:

- ◆ Grass over the leaching bed has patches which look abnormally healthy.
- ◆ There are soggy areas with surfacing grey water, or areas with surfacing sewage on or near the leaching bed
- ◆ Grass above the leaching bed is unusually wet.
- ◆ Your sinks, showers and toilets drain more slowly.
- ◆ Sewage begins backing up in the toilet and drains.
- ◆ There is a sewage odour over the area of your leaching bed.
- ◆ Bacteria or nitrate contamination shows up in your drinking water tests.
- ◆ There is significant algae growth in nearby water bodies.

By maintaining a healthy septic system you may:

- ◆ Save thousands of dollars in septic repairs or replacement
- ◆ Avoid potential health risks that can be related to failing septic systems
- ◆ Prevent contamination of local drinking water
- ◆ Protect water quality for local swimming, recreation as well as fish and wildlife in nearby stream and lakes.

A properly functioning septic system can work for many years and ensure that your health and that of nearby surface and groundwater is protected.

Turn the page and test your septic system awareness knowledge!

Failing Septic Systems



Photo Courtesy of sharedwaters.net



Photo Courtesy of www.aerostream.com/aerobic-anaerobic.html



Photo Courtesy of <http://www.oowa.org/resources/PDF/Septic%20Smart.pdf>

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ARE YOU SEPTIC SAVVY?

Test your septic smarts by answering the following questions:

1. How often should you have your septic tank pumped?
2. What is the average lifespan of a septic system's holding tank and leaching bed?
3. Should you plant trees, shrubs or vegetable gardens on or near your leaching bed?
4. When is it ok to drive or park cars or heavy machinery on the septic bed?
5. How often should you test your drinking water from your private well?
6. Should your eavestroughs and/or sump pump discharge to your septic system's holding tank?
7. When is it ok to pour household chemical (paint, chlorine bleach, cleaning products) down the drain?

Answers

1. The tank should be pumped out every 3 – 5 years.
2. Septic tanks and leaching beds can last 25 years or more if they are properly installed, operated and maintained.
3. Roots from trees and shrubs can plug and break tiles in your leaching bed. Only grass cover should be used over your septic system.
4. Never. Heavy equipment can crush the pipes and compact the soil in the bed to such an extent that it can no longer filter and absorb the sewage nutrients.
5. Drinking water from private wells should be tested 3 times per year.
6. Water from eavestroughs and sump pumps can overload your septic system and should never be discharged into the holding tank.
7. Never. Your septic system cannot properly treat chemicals.

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