

# The Reservoir Review

*A Newsletter About Life on Neponset Reservoir*

## Maintaining your Septic System

*Whether it's a septic system or a sewer system, everything that goes down our drains eventually makes its way into our environment.*

Our wastewater (water that has been used for washing, flushing, manufacturing, etc.) directly affects the cleanliness and quality of groundwater and surface water in local waterways, the Neponset River, and Boston Harbor, impacting drinking water sources and environmental habitats.

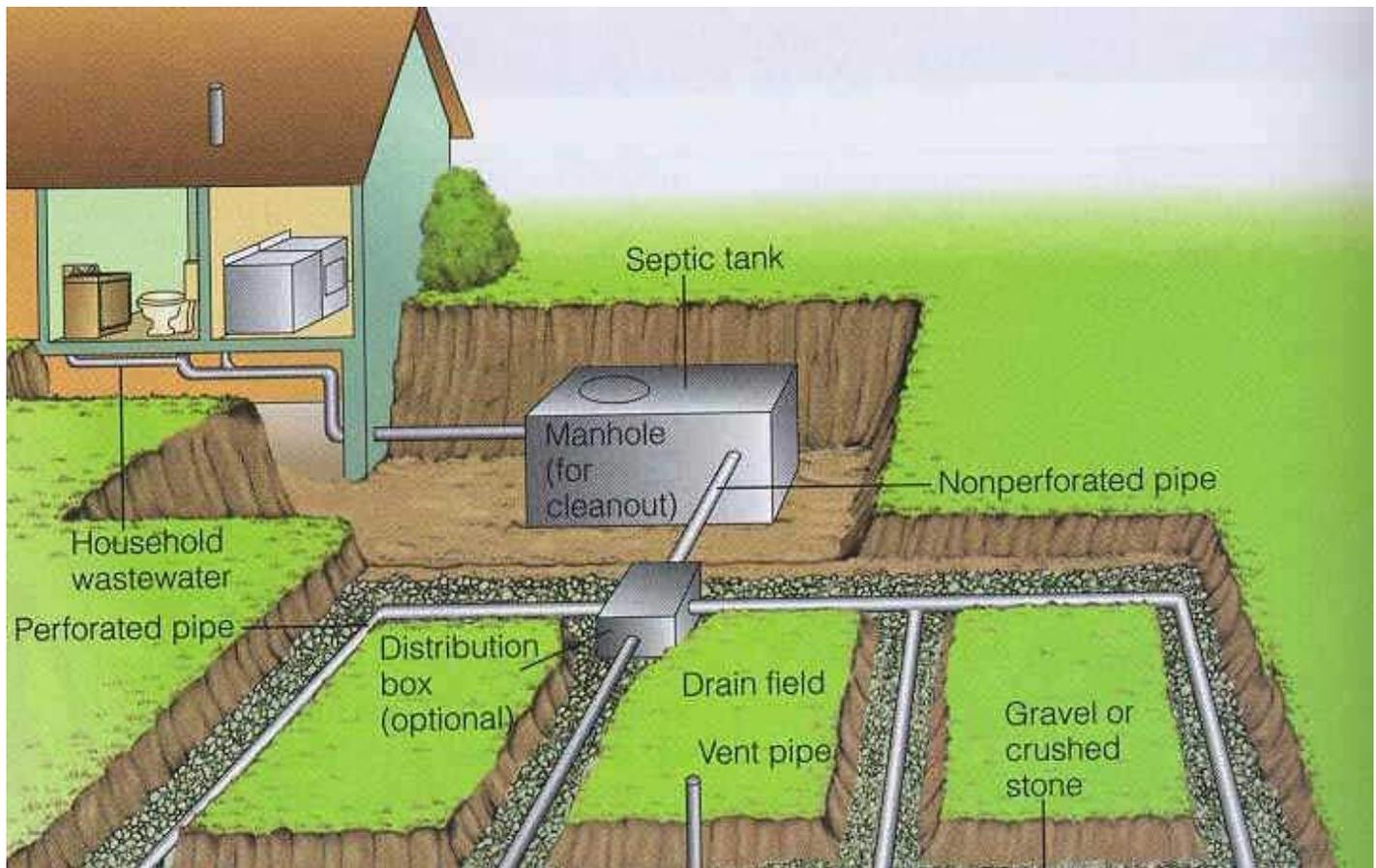
### Take steps to reduce wastewater pollution

1. Replace harsh chemical cleaners with non-toxic, more environmentally-friendly products. Follow the directions on cleaners and use only the recommended amounts.
2. Never pour medicine down the sink or flush it down the toilet! To dispose of medication, use one of these options:
  - Use [this tool](#) from the MassDEP to find a permanent medicine collection kiosk near you.
  - Bring your prescription medicine to a local Drug Take-Back Day. Contact your local police department for more information.
  - Remove labels from containers, mix medicine (do not crush tablets or capsules) with dirt, kitty litter or used coffee grounds, and seal inside the container by putting tape around the lid before throwing away.

### Learn how your septic systems works – and maintain it!

Leaking and poorly maintained septic systems release excess nutrients, bacteria and viruses, which cause public health problems and environmental concerns. They are also very expensive to repair if you ignore them!

[Click here to learn how septic systems work.](#)



*You probably never thought of it this way, but by cleaning and recycling our water, septic systems keep water local, and help to make our communities a beautiful place to live.*

## How to Maintain Your Septic System

Using a properly maintained septic system costs considerably *less* than paying annual sewer usage fees. However, when septic systems are not properly maintained, they can cost a bundle.

An ignored septic system is guaranteed to fail, cause water pollution, and create big repair bills. You wouldn't try to drive your car for 100,000 miles without an oil change. Yet without thinking about it, many people routinely dump ten years worth of waste into their septic system, and expect it to disappear. Septic systems are extraordinary devices, but they're not magic.

This is why we advise you to follow these simple rules of septic system maintenance. Together, we can save money and keep the Neponset Watershed's waterways clean and flowing!

## Pump it out!

Keeping your system clean with regular pump-outs is the most important step in septic maintenance.

- Everyone should have their septic system inspected by a qualified contractor at least every 3 years.
- The septic system should be pumped out on an interval suggested by an inspector (generally every 3-5 years depending on the size of system, how many people live in your home, and your water use habits).
- People using garbage disposals and those with very large households will usually need to pump more often.

Pumping is cheap insurance, so when in doubt, pump it out! Regular pumping will keep solids from building up in the tank and discharging to the leach field, where they can clog the system and create costly repairs. It will also help you find and fix small problems before they become big headaches. Also, remember that chemical additives or septic system cleaners (despite advertisements) are no substitute for pump-outs; they don't make solids disappear! The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection does not recommend using septic system additives.

## Reduce Water Use

Household water conservation will help your septic system function more efficiently, and reduce your water and energy bills. Keep these tips in mind:

- Repair leaking fixtures.
- Replace that 5-gallon toilet with a modern low-flow model (the new ones get the job done and are surprisingly cheap).
- Install a stylish low-flow shower head (you won't run out of hot water in the shower, anymore).
- When you buy a new washing machine or dishwasher, insist on a model with the Energy Star Label.
- Don't let the water run during teeth-brushing, shaving or dish washing.

## Hold the Garbage!

You can help your septic system get in shape by putting it on a low-solids diet. Here's how you can send fewer solids down your drains:

- Don't use your toilet as a wastebasket.
- Avoid using a garbage disposal, or better yet, don't install one at all.
- Watch out for certain foods, like cooking grease, that are sure to cause your system heartburn. Grease can cause clogs and build up in a septic tank. Don't pour grease down the drain, collect it in a can and dispose of it in the trash after it solidifies.

## Don't Sterilize It

Beneficial bacteria are one of the keys to a healthy septic system; anything you put down the drain that kills bacteria also harms your septic system.

- Try to limit your use of harsh chemicals and antibacterial products such as bleach, ammonia and drain cleaners. For example, spot-clean mildew in the shower with bleach instead of cleaning the whole shower using a cleanser containing bleach.
- Clear clogged drains with a plunger, boiling water, or a drain snake rather than with chemicals. In one study, *less than 12 grams* of drain cleaner killed the bacteria in a septic system!
- Finally, never put paint, motor oil, pesticides or other household hazardous wastes down the drain. Bring them to your Town's Hazardous Waste Collection Day.

## Map It

Map the location of your holding tank and leaching field to prevent damage to your system. Knowing where your system is can help you avoid partaking in activities that can block, crush, or crack system components. Knowing where your system is will also save you money on pump-outs and inspections!

- Don't drive across your septic system.
- Don't pave or brick over it.
- Don't plant shrubs or trees above it.
- Don't dig into it (for things like swimming pools).
- Don't block access to the holding tank.

## Why Maintain Your Septic System?

### Save Money

Having your septic system regularly inspected and pumped on an appropriate interval is much cheaper than replacing it or installing a sewer.

### Protect Water Quality

Sewage from failing septic systems pollutes ponds, streams and wetlands, choking them with mats of algae and aquatic vegetation, causing fish kills and making swimmers and fishermen sick.

- Failing septic systems can also pollute drinking water wells that you and your neighbors depend on for tap water.

### Be in compliance

Under Massachusetts law, your septic system must pass state inspection guidelines before you sell your home. Consider that with proper maintenance, your septic system could last up to 30 years. Without maintenance, it can fail in 5-10 years. While minor repairs on a well maintained system are often inexpensive, the cost of completely replacing your system can reach from \$12,000 to as high as \$55,000.

## Common reasons that septic systems fail:

- A system hasn't been pumped in a while
  - Excessive solids will build up in a holding tank and eventually clog the leaching field
- When we dump solids or liquids faster than they can be treated
- When the water table is too high because of flooding or heavy rains
- When tree roots start growing into the leaching field pipes
- When bacteria die-off due to chemicals
- When there is a crack or obstruction in the system

## You might have a septic system problem if you notice:

- Sewage or wet spots on the ground above the leaching field
- Gurgling or slow-draining indoor drains
- Septic tank back-ups
- Sewage odors in the house or yard
- Persistent problems despite pump-outs
- Test indicating bacteria in nearby well water, streams or ponds
- Build-up of algae and other aquatic vegetation in local waterbodies

***Please schedule an inspection if any of the above occurs!***

### **Resources:**

[The Sewer: Where Your Waste Goes](#) (MWRA)

[Homebuyers Guide to Septic Systems](#) (HIC)

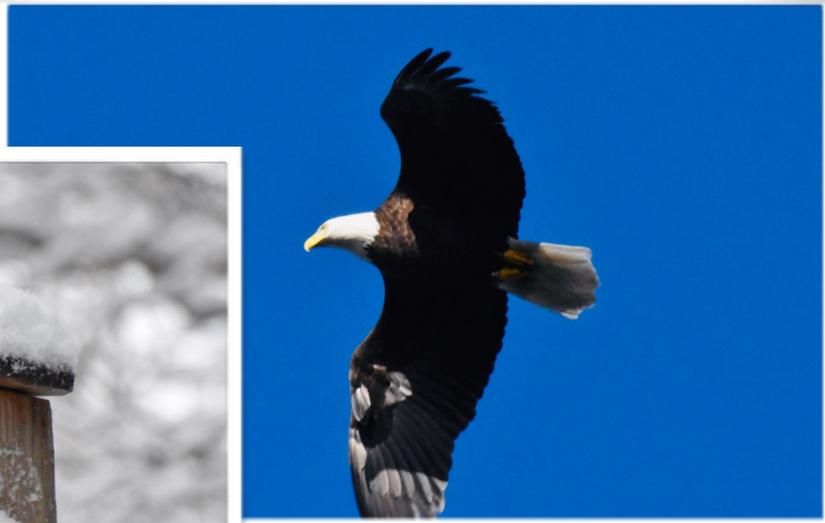
[About Title 5](#) (MA Dept. of Environmental Protection)

[Re-consider Your Chemical Use at Home](#) (MWRA)

*Content provided by the Neponset River Watershed Association on behalf of the Neponset Stormwater Partnership. Learn more at [www.neponset.org](http://www.neponset.org) and [YourCleanWater.org](http://YourCleanWater.org)*

The April 9, 2020 NRRC meeting will have the upcoming Reservoir Weed Treatment as one of their agenda items. Please plan on coming to this meeting if you want information on the subject or to discuss weed treatment. Meetings are the 2nd Thursday of the month at 7:00 PM at Boyden Library.

# SPOTLIGHT ON NATURE



*Photos by Lisa Criscione*



*Photos by Janet O'Leary*

The *Reservoir Review* newsletter will be moving to an electronic version by Summer 2020. This will allow us to give you more timely content delivered directly to your inbox. To sign up to continue receiving *Reservoir Review*, go to our website at [www.neponsetreservoir.com](http://www.neponsetreservoir.com) and click on the SIGN UP tab.

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