

# Citizen's Guide to the Michigan Wellhead Protection Program



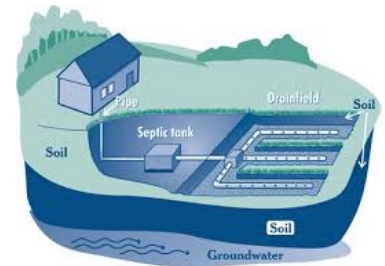
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Michigan Rural Water Association's  
Source Water Protection Program Article Series

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## PROTECT YOUR DRINKING WATER: MAINTAIN YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM

### WHAT IS A SEPTIC SYSTEM?

Water from your bathroom, kitchen and washing machine all go into a septic tank where solids settle out. The majority of the solids are digested by bacteria and the remaining fluid flows into a drainfield where it slowly filters through the soil. Organisms in the soil consume the remaining waste.



US Environmental Protection Agency

### ENSURE YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM IS FUNCTIONING PROPERLY

- ✓ **Have your septic system inspected and pumped every 5 to 6 years.**
  - Hire a septic tank service contractor that is required to have a state permit to handle and dispose of sewage.
  - Businesses are listed in the telephone directory or call the local County Health Department.
- ✓ **Use less water.**
  - Don't let the water run while brushing your teeth, washing your hands and dishes, shaving, etc.
  - Spread your laundry washing out over the week to avoid putting a lot of water into the drainfield.
- ✓ **Avoid using chemicals and additives.**
  - Chemicals such as drain cleaners, toilet bowl cleaners and "miracle system cleaners" will kill the bacteria that break down sludge in your septic system.
  - Always check the product label to make sure it is safe to use in a septic system.
  - Alternative drain cleaner: ½ cup of baking soda, followed by ½ cup of vinegar, poured down the drain, let sit for a couple minutes and follow with boiling water.
- ✓ **Dispose only certain items in your septic system.**
  - Only dispose toilet wastes and water used for bathing, cooking, laundry and dishwashing into the septic system.
  - Cloggers: Diapers, cat litter, cigarette butts, coffee grounds, grease, feminine hygiene products, etc.
  - Killers: Household chemicals, gasoline, oil, pesticides, antifreeze, paint, etc.
- ✓ **Keep vehicles, livestock and buildings off your septic system.**
  - Keep vehicles away from the drainfield and septic tank and never build or pave over the drainfield.
  - Driving or building over the drainfield can impact the soil and break pipes. Soil compaction and paving prevents oxygen from getting into the soil. This oxygen is needed by bacteria to break down and treat sewage.
- ✓ **Plant only grass over and near your septic system.**
  - Roots from nearby trees and shrubs might clog and damage the system.
  - Do not apply fertilizers or manure over the drainfield.
- ✓ **LOCATE YOUR SEPTIC TANK AND DRAINFIELD, AND KEEP A RECORD OF INSPECTION AND PUMPAGE.**

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