

CHIPPEWA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ZONING

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POWTS Maintenance/Pumping Reporting and Proper Use

To: Property Owners with Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (POWTS)

From: Greg Gruna, Chippewa County Zoning Inspector

Maintenance Reporting/Requirements

Since 1985, Chippewa County has required mandatory maintenance or pumping of a septic tank for all private septic systems. The program requires that the septic tank be pumped at least once every three years. Chippewa County has an inventory of all septic systems installed since 1985. This was required when the County began participation in the Wisconsin Fund program that year. Notices for required pumping are sent every three years from the date of install. If an owner wishes to pump more often, it is at their discretion.

The required maintenance/pumping must be completed by a certified septic pumper. If you do not wish to have the tank pumped, you can choose to contact one of the later mentioned certified individuals to inspect the septic tank to determine that the accumulated sludge and scum volume in the tank does not occupy at least 1/3 of the tanks capacity. Individuals who can perform this work include: a licensed plumber (master or restricted service), certified POWTS inspector, certified septic servicing operator, or a registered POWTS maintainer. If it is found that the tank has less than 1/3 volume, the certified individual can file a report verifying this with the County in lieu of a pumping report.

Proper use of your septic system

Sanitary systems will often fail due to solids plugging the soils of the drainfield. This in turn hinders the effluent from migrating down through the soil. It is important to keep as much of these solids from getting into your system as possible. Septic tanks accept the home's wastewater and settle most solids out. The heavier solids sink to the bottom and form a sludge layer. The lighter solids, fats, oils, grease, etc., rise to the surface and form a scum layer. The relatively clear layer in the middle of the tank is the effluent.

The tank works with anaerobic bacteria to break down the solids and destroy pathogens. From the septic tank the effluent enters the soil treatment phase of the process often called the drainfield. The drainfield is often made up of chamber-like filtration units. The effluent is dispersed down through the drainfield and treatment of the pathogens and viruses occurs. Once the effluent travels down through 3' of soils, the treatment process is considered complete. NOTE: Most septic tanks now utilize a filtering device in the septic tank or outside the tank (filter box). Please understand what the manufacturer's recommendation is on cleaning this filtering device.

The more water the home uses, the more water the septic system has to treat. Install water saving devices and practice water saving techniques. If you have a water softener, know that they can discharge hundreds of gallons of water to your system every week. Purchase a water demand vs. timed unit that treats only the water you use and is not based on an automatic timer that discharges no matter how much water you use. Normal use of household cleaners is safe to use, but over-use of these chemicals can disrupt and kill the good bacteria needed in the treatment process. Try to avoid heavy water use all at one time. Water use should be spread out by doing 1-2 loads of laundry per day rather than 5-10 loads on a Saturday. Keep heavy vehicular traffic off the drainfield area. Compaction of the soil destroys the natural structure needed for proper treatment. Proper use of a sanitary system is essential in achieving longer life expectancy. If you should have any questions on the operation of your sanitary system, please feel free to contact me at the number listed above.