Barton County

Barton Invests in Growth

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR ON-SITE WASTEWATER SYSTEM

Have you ever considered what you can do as a homeowner to increase the longevity of your system? If you live in the country in Barton County, then chances are that you have an on-site wastewater system or "septic system" of some kind. Most of these systems consist of a septic tank with a lateral field or an absorption pit.

There are many simple things that can be done that don't require much change in anyone's daily routine:

SEPTIC TANK ADDITIVES:

Over the years many people have asked if we recommend septic tank additives. The answer to that question is simple: NO! There are plenty of active bacteria produced on a daily basis to effectively break down human waste in a septic tank. For those of you who feel like you have to add something anyway….feel free to add as much yeast as you would like. It's inexpensive, it's all natural, and it's nothing more than active bacteria.

USE LIQUID DETERGENTS:

Powdered detergents fall out of solution after they go down the drain and re-crystallize. These crystals can choke your septic tank from the top down, which may in time plug off your outlet line to your lateral field. Also, if this liquefied powdered detergent makes its way out to the lateral field and re-crystallizes in the lateral line, it will plug off the perforated holes in your pipe, or coat the bottom of the trench so that no water can penetrate the soil.

USE SEPTIC TANK FRIENDLY SOAPS

One of the most marketed types of new products out there right now is "anti-bacterial" soaps. They come in all types of applications, and the bottom line is that they are not good for your septic system. The basic principle of a septic tank is that the "bacteria" in the tank break down the solids and various particles as they come in to the tank, and treat the waste so that it can safely be sent out of your tank to your treatment field. If you use "anti-bacterial" soaps, then they work to kill the bacteria that are in the tank, therefore disrupting the process necessary for your septic tank to do its job. Beware of hand soaps, body soaps/shower gels and dish soap. Do not use any "anti-bacterial" soaps period.

LIQUID FABRIC SOFTENERS:

Liquid fabric softeners are not a good idea if you have a private septic system. The liquid itself is denser than most waste that we flush down our drains, and so it has a tendency to "roll" the material in the septic tank out and into the lateral field. For those of you, who want soft, non-electrified clothes, use a dryer sheet only.

FIX WATER LEAKS IMMEDIATELY

Any leaky stool or faucet can send hundreds of gallons of wasted water to your septic system every day. This wasted water has to then be absorbed by the soil, which means that less regular wastewater can be taken in by the soil.

RE-GENERATE YOUR WATER SOFTENER SPARINGLY

If you have a water softener, be cautious of the frequency of your re-generations. Every time that your water softener cycles through, once again, there is a lot of wasted water going to your septic system. Choose a setting on your water softener that allows for in-frequent cycling, so as to cut down on wasted water that your soil has to absorb.

PROPER PLUMBING FOR YOUR WATER SOFTENER

Recently it has been learned that you can cross-contaminate your fresh water supply by hooking up your water softener incorrectly to your wastewater system. There is no state regulation on private water wells; however it does state that for people using public water supply – that backflow or back siphonage devises must be used. Common sense would tell you that it would not be good to cross contaminate any drinking water supply. So it is recommended that you follow the same rules for private water supplies as are set for Public water supplies. They state that all potable water supplies shall be separated by a minimum prescribed air gap. There is no mechanical connection allowed between potable water and non-potable (wastewater) supplies.

What this means in plain terms is that you don't want your waste line from your water softener hooked up directly to your sewer line for your house. You need to have an air gap distance of "twice the diameter of the pipe" to the drain. That way you don't get back siphonage into the recharge hose and the water supply. If you allow this "hard connection" and you experience back siphonage when your water softener comes on to go through a cycle, it can suck wastewater out of the sewer line and pull it into your water line. **Not good!** The reason an air gap is necessary is due to the nature of the situation. A backflow device does prevent backflow however bacteria are not stopped by a backflow device. You need a physical air gap to achieve this.

KNOW WHAT NOT TO FLUSH

As a general rule, do not dispose of anything in your septic system that can just as easily be put in the trash. Remember, the more solids that you put in your tank, they build up and eventually need to be pumped out. Garbage disposals can increase the amount of solids in the tank by up to 50% and are not recommended for use with septic systems, unless you

pump out your tank more often to overcome the solids from building up. It is important not to allow grease, milk and flour to go down your drain as they are very difficult to break down in a septic tank. They are considered a "high strength" type of wastewater that creates problems for septic systems. The same common sense approach used in the kitchen should be used in the bathroom. The only things that should be flushed down the toilet are wastewater, waste solids and toilet paper.

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR TOILET PAPER

Choose a toilet paper that can easily break down in your septic tank. The best type of paper to use may surprise you. If you want to be "septic tank friendly" then purchase the most inexpensive, white, single-ply tissue you can find. The thicker a tissue is, the longer it takes to break down in your tank. With this in mind; when you are using Kleenex tissues, and/or paper towels, do not flush them down the drain. They are thicker in nature than toilet paper, and so therefore they take even longer to break down in a septic tank. Another factor that contributes to the length of time necessary to break down toilet paper in a septic tank includes dyes used in colored tissues. The dyes must first be broken down before the paper itself can even begin the break down process.

PUMP OUT YOUR SEPTIC TANK REGULARLY

Don't fall victim to the "out of sight out of mind" trap with your septic tank. Your septic tank needs to be pumped out regularly. The average tank should be pumped out every three years with-out-fail. If you do not pump out the tank consistently, then you run the risk of solids building up and being sent out to your lateral field which can result in your lateral field being plugged off and failing. If you have a garbage disposal, you may want to consider pumping every one to two years.

The Barton County Environmental Management Division office is located at the intersection of 12th and Baker Avenue just two blocks north of 10th Street on Baker Avenue in Great Bend. All mail needs to be sent to: 1213 Baker Avenue, Great Bend, KS 67530. We can also be reached by phone at (office) 620-796-4300, (county cell-Judy) 620-792-9905, (county cell-Mark) 620-793-0219, (fax) 620-793-1977, and email at: jgoreham@bartoncounty.org or mcooper@bartoncounty.org. Please remember that Barton County does require permits for both septic system repair and installations, and for all water wells. We also require licenses for all Contractors that install septic systems, Pumpers that pump out septic tanks, and Well Drillers need to be licensed through the Kansas Department of Health & Environment (KDHE) in Topeka.

We welcome your calls, and we will eagerly help you in any way that we can.