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SEPTIC SYSTEM INFORMATION

Q. When I hear an outside alarm, a. What do I do? b. Who do I call, what about after hours?

- a. Confirm that it is your alarm and that it is the septic alarm.
- b. An alarm goes off because the pump has failed to run. This can be for a number of reasons. The first thing to do is make sure the circuit breaker is on (this is located with all of the household breakers and should be labeled). If resetting this does not fix the problem then look to see if the pump is manually plugged in. Not all systems are of the plug in variety, if yours is it will be obvious and the plug would normally be located very close to the alarm.
- c. If none of the above has helped you will need to call your plumber as you may have a number of different problems, all of which should be able to be diagnosed and repaired by a reputable plumber. The plumber must have the ability to check the electrical to be sure the pump and related hardware is being properly powered. A reputable electrician is a good alternative, although you may meet some resistance on their part to work on plumbing should they have to remove the pump. Your installer (the excavating contractor) is not trained to diagnose or repair problems. On new installs the work described is performed by the electrical contractor after the excavator has installed the hardware. **Most plumbing and electrical contractors have after hours numbers.**

Q. What happens if it is winter and no one is at the house? Is there an auto call?

- a. Generally if the house is unoccupied there is no water use and therefore no reason for the septic to run. That said it is still possible to have a problem occur should things such as; a dehumidifier create a lot of water, a utility develops a water leak (running toilet as an example), etc.....Although it is possible to set up an auto call system, I have never seen one installed in over 20 years of installation.

Q. What are the lids I see in the ground? Do I have to do anything with them?

- a. These are access points to your septic and pump tanks. The lids should remain exposed for ease of access should a repair be needed. And because once buried memory recall begins to fade quickly, especially after an ownership change. PVC and fiberglass lids are secured with screws and cast iron lids are secure in their own weight. Please double check the lids after anyone has performed any kind of service on your system.

Q. What if we smell sewer gasses inside the home? Outside the home?

- a. If you smell sewer gas inside your home you have a plumbing problem that should be addressed immediately unless the smell is the result of the smell coming through an open window. If the smell is outdoors it is likely normal and you are smelling it as a result of a down draft or very still and humid air carrying the smell from your roof vents. If the problem persists you may need to modify the roof vents. If the problem is a result of pooling liquids on the ground you have a sewage problem that should be addressed immediately.

Q. Do we need to service the system? How often?

- a. Your system does require service. It likely contains a filter of some sort that could require cleaning as often as 2 times per year (one time is more likely). A clogged filter will result in a sewage back-up if not addressed as a part of an annual maintenance program (the septic tank pumper can perform this). This filter prolongs the life of the systems absorption area tremendously. Removal could result in permanent and expensive repairs. It is possible to perform this task on your own on most gravity systems with just a good pair of disposable rubber gloves and a garden hose. A pump system filter may require that you hire as outlined above.
- b. Your septic tank must also be pumped on occasion. It is recommended that the tank be pumped out after the second year and then every 2-3 years following the initial pump out. More often if your home is equipped with a garbage disposal or if large amounts laundry is regularly done at this location.

Q. What if the power goes out? Will there be a backflow of sewage? Can we still flush the toilets? Use our water?

- a. If the power fails you may continue to use your septic if it is a gravity drain system. If you have a pump system you should minimize use, however this may not be an issue as you likely will have also lost your power to the well and you will have little to no water to use until power is restored. There should be no reason for sewage to back up due to a power outage.

Q. Do we have to do anything for winter care?

- a. No. However care should be taken to prevent snow from being shoveled or plowed onto or off of any part of the system.

Q. Is there any warranty on the parts or labor?

- a. Generally there is a one (1) year warranty on both parts and labor. During this period it would be proper to call the installer prior to an electrician or plumber as it could result in a bill to you if the fix was not a warranty issue.

Q. What if our toilets are getting repeatedly plugged? Is this a septic problem?

- a. If only the toilets are causing problems and the showers and tubs are good then the problem is not likely to be the septic system.. If all the drains are slow then there is a fair chance it may be your septic system, most likely the filter is plugging and needs to be cleaned.

Q. Should we add anything to the system to enhance performance?

- a. **NO!** These products are not good for the system and will lead to expensive reconstruction of the absorption area. Most products claim to clean and accelerate decomposition of the waste. That is exactly what they do. The sludge then flows from the now clean tank and pipes to your absorption area and causes premature failure.

Q. Is it safe to use toilet bowl inserts for cleaning and sanitation purposes?

- a. In general chemicals are bad for the septic system. If they claim to be septic system safe you may be alright. **HOWEVER** if the product contains anti-bacterial properties **it should not be used!**

Q. Can we dig freely in our yard without worry of hitting any parts of the septic system?

- a. **NO!** This could result in damage to your system. One should plan irrigation routes carefully to minimize saturation of the soil in the absorption area. NO trees or shrubbery should be planted in this area or within 5' (for shrubs) and 10' (for trees) of the tank location.

Q. Is there a drawing that shows me where my system is? Relative to the house or property line?

- a. Yes. If the system was an engineered system the drawing will be quite exact. If it was a standard construction issued through the health department there will be a permit with a sketch showing the approximate location for both the tank and the field. The tank is easier to find as it should have lids for filter service or tank cleaning. The absorption area is harder to identify as it is entirely buried. Generally it is in a flat location in your yard located downhill of the septic system. If you have a pump system your field is likely a visible mound or located far enough away from the home that you may not need to worry. **Please reference any drawing you have before doing any digging.** Your builder should have supplied you with a copy of the permit for your system as a part of your new home package. If it is a replacement system you already should have a copy of the permit. If not we can supply you with a copy of our copy if we have not already mailed it to you. The health department also maintains copies of all permits.