

## Why is it important to properly maintain my septic tank?

### It saves you money.

Malfunctioning systems can cost \$3000-\$10000 or more to repair or replace compared to maintenance costs of about \$250-\$500 every three to five years.

### It protects the value of your home.

Malfunctioning septic systems can drastically reduce property values, hamper the sale of your home, and even pose a legal liability.

### It keeps our water clean and safe.

A properly maintained system helps keep local rivers and lakes, including Lake Michigan, clean for your use and enjoyment. If you have a well, it also reduces the risk of drinking contaminated water.

### It keeps the environment clean.

Malfunctioning septic systems can damage the local ecosystem by harming plants, fish, and shellfish native to Indiana's Lake Michigan watershed.

## How do I talk to my neighbors about septic system maintenance?

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources Lake Michigan Coastal Program has educational materials available for you to share with your neighbors, including:

- *Simple Tips* postcards: A postcard that shares what you can do to keep your septic system functioning properly
- *Good Neighbor* yard signs: These yard signs recognize community residents who have pledged to have their septic system maintained every 3 to 5 years. The signs can be used as reminders and to create a community conversation about regular maintenance.
- US EPA *SepticSmart* materials: These items provide additional information on septic system maintenance.
- Contact the Indiana DNR Lake Michigan Coastal Program for outreach and education materials at 219-250-5402.

## Simple tips to protect and maintain your system:

- Have your tank pumped and system inspected by certified and licensed professionals every 3 to 5 years.
- Don't pour grease, fats, or harmful chemicals like paints and solvents down your drain. They can clog or otherwise harm your system.
- Don't flush non-degradable items such as diapers, wipes, or feminine hygiene products.
- Don't drive or park on your drainfield. Avoid planting trees and shrubs over the drainfield.
- Fix household leaks and use water efficiently to avoid overtaxing your system.
- Contact your local health department for any questions you may have. Their numbers are included in this brochure. They're here to help!

## How does a septic system work?

This is a simplified overview of how a septic system works.

- 1 All water runs out of your house from one main **drainage pipe** into a septic tank.
- 2 The **septic tank** is a buried, water-tight container usually made of concrete, fiberglass or polyethylene. Its job is to hold the wastewater long enough to allow solids to settle down to the bottom (forming sludge), while the oil and grease floats to the top (as scum). Compartments and a T-shaped outlet prevent the sludge and scum from leaving the tank and traveling into the drainfield area.
- 3 The liquid wastewater then exits the tank into the **drainfield**. If the drainfield is overloaded with too much liquid, it will flood, causing sewage to flow to the ground surface or create backups in toilets and sinks.
- 4 Finally, the wastewater precolates into the **soil**, naturally removing harmful bacteria, viruses and nutrients.

