

Septic System Failures

A septic system can fail for several reasons, including:

- Cracked or leaking tank.
- Clogs in the drain field caused by fats, oils, grease, or solids like trash.
- Crushed septic components.
- Excessive water usage in the home.
- Root infiltration.
- Age.

How To Spot A Failure

Signs that a septic system may be failing include:

- **Bright green, spongy grass on the drain field, especially during dry weather.**
- **Pooling water or muddy soil.**
- **Strong odor.**
- **Slow draining fixtures.**
- **Gurgling sounds in the plumbing system.**
- **Wastewater backing up into household drains.**

First Steps If You Notice A Failure

If you suspect a septic system failure, take these immediate steps:

- Contact a Maintenance Service Provider (MSP) licensed in Island County to perform a **full septic system inspection**.
- **Conserve water** in your home. Consider washing laundry and showering at a friend's house or the gym.
- Arrange for **temporary sewage disposal** if necessary.

Steps For Repair Of Failures

Step 1: Contact a Septic Designer licensed by Washington State. They will assess what type of system is right for you and will submit their design permit with the County.

Step 2: Contact a Septic Installer licensed by Island County to perform the installation.

Step 3: Pass your final inspection.

Contact Us

Have questions about on-site sewage?
Need to file an environmental health complaint?

Visit:

Island County Public Health
On-site Sewage
Operations and Maintenance



(360) 679-7318



OperationsAndMaintenance@IslandCountyWA.gov



Island County Public Health
1 NE 6th Street
Coupeville, WA. 98239
(360) 679-7350



Scan the
QR Code for
our website.



SCAN HERE

www.islandcountywa.gov/190/Onsite-Sewage-Septic-Systems



Maintaining Your On-site Septic System

Easy Ways to Avoid Costly Repairs

Environmental Health
Island County Public Health



Introduction

The average lifespan of a septic system is approximately 30 years, but can last longer with proper care and maintenance. **Here are six easy ways to maintain your system and avoid costly repairs.**

1 Know Your System

Your septic system functions as your personal wastewater treatment facility. It collects and disperses all household wastewater from bathrooms, kitchen sinks, laundry, and more.

Things To Know

➤ What Type Of System Do I Have?

Refer to your septic system as-built map and past maintenance records to identify the specific components of your system.

➤ Where Is It Located?

Your septic system as-built map will help you locate your septic tank, drain field, reserve area, and other components, so you can protect them.

➤ What Is Its Maintenance History?

Check the Public Portal for past inspection and pumping records to stay informed about your system's records.

Access Your Septic Records

Use the **Island County Public Portal** to identify your system type, review maintenance history, and find your septic system as-built map.

Public Portal Website:
Scan the QR Code with your phone's camera to access the Public Portal.



<https://co-island-wa.smartgovcommunity.com/Public/Home>

2 Know What Can Go Down the Drain

Only dispose of mild liquids, detergents, human waste, toilet paper, and water down the drain. Avoid harsh chemicals, as they can kill the beneficial bacteria in the tank and drain field. Refrain from using a garbage disposal, as the accumulation of solids can lead to increased maintenance costs and more frequent pumping.

DO FLUSH

The following can be flushed down the toilet.



Toilet paper

DO NOT FLUSH

The following cannot go in the toilet as they can clog pipes and septic systems.



Paper towels



Cigarette butts



Disposable diapers



Wipes
(Baby or flushable)



Feminine hygiene
products



Plastics



Medications



Cotton
(Cotton swabs or balls)



Dental floss



Toxic Substances

Dispose these items in the trash.

3 Conserve Water

Distribute your water usage throughout the week. Avoid washing multiple loads of laundry on the same day, fix any leaky fixtures, and redirect roof downspouts away from the drain field. Your system is designed to handle a specific amount of water daily; excess water can overwhelm the system and lead to premature failure.

4 Protect Your Primary And Reserve Drain Fields

Keep your drain field and reserve area clear of livestock, vehicle traffic, sprinklers, and downspouts. Avoid planting trees or deep-rooted plants, as their roots can grow into your septic components and clog the lines.

5 Regular Preventative Maintenance

- ✓ **SCHEDULE** regular inspections with a Maintenance Service Provider (MSP) licensed by Island County:
 - **Every 3 years** – for all systems consisting solely of a septic tank and a gravity drainfield.
 - **Annually** – for all other system types.
- ✓ **PUMP** your tank when solids/grease make up 30% of its volume. (Usually every 3 - 5 years).
- ✓ **CLEAN** filters regularly to prevent clogs in the tank that could lead to sewage backing up into the home.

6 Know Your Septic Professionals

Maintenance Service Providers (MSPs)
Are licensed to perform required on-site septic system inspections.

Septic Tank Pumpers
Are licensed to remove tank contents.



SEPTIC PROFESSIONALS
www.islandcounty.wa.gov/678/Hiring-a-Professional---Industry-Contact

