

ISLAND COUNTY
PUBLIC HEALTH



PO Box 5000
Coupeville, WA 98239

Definition:

- ◇ Deficiencies are potential problems with your septic system identified by a Maintenance Service Provider on an inspection report.
- ◇ Some deficiencies are more significant than others.
- ◇ These common deficiencies, if left alone, could cause serious damage to your system over time.

Nolan Simmons
(360) 678-7917
n.simmons@islandcountywa.
gov

Septic System Deficiencies Explained

Baffle Conditions

Properly maintained inlet and outlet baffles are the key to a healthy septic tank. The inlet baffle is the first connection between the sewer line and the tank, and prevents scum from collecting or backing up in that line. The outlet baffle is the gateway to the rest of your septic system and, along with filters, helps prevent any solids from entering and clogging other treatment components.

Watertight Components & Risers

Access risers and lids are very helpful to fully evaluate tank conditions and diagnose problems that may be occurring. It's critical to ensure these and your entire tank are watertight to prevent ground or surface water from overloading your system. Beginning in 2007 all newly installed systems must have risers.

Pumping Required

Pumping is critical to ensuring a long and healthy life for your tank and system. It prevents the buildup of fats, oils, greases, and sludge. Septic tanks and pump tanks are required to be pumped out when solids reach 1/3 of the total tank volume.

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What To Do?

- ◇ Correcting these will prevent larger problems from occurring.
- ◇ Many of these deficiencies can be corrected without the need of a permit.
- ◇ Contact a county-licensed septic professional for all pumping, permitted repairs, and non-permitted corrections.

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Alarms

Systems utilizing pumps or more complex components include alarms for these added features. Having properly functioning alarms allow you and your septic professional to be aware of when something is going wrong with your system. If these are damaged problems will continue to pile up without your knowledge.

Encroachment & Root Intrusion

It's strongly recommended that you do not build or plant large vegetation over your drainfield or septic components. Building over your drainfield will disturb the soil your system is utilizing. Altering the soil conditions of your system will alter it's ability to adequately treat your wastewater. Planting large trees and vegetation over your drainfield or septic components poses a risk of root intrusion that can grow into, crack, and clog different components in your system and cause it to malfunction. If you are going to landscape over your drainfield remember to use low-water usage, shallow rooted plants.

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Pump Controls

Any system that requires a pump will have electrical wiring and control elements. These control panels often regulate the volume and time each dose that is pumped to your drainfield. If wiring is burnt up or control panels are malfunctioning, chances are your pump will too.

Low Liquid Levels

If a tank or component is experiencing low liquid levels one of a few things could be happening. The tank may be experiencing a leak or crack which could lead to groundwater pollution. The levels could also be low if a property practices extreme water conservation or is only occupied part-time.

Flooded Component

If a tank or component is experiencing elevated levels or sewage flooding onto the ground, it typically indicates an issue down the line in your system. The drainfield or other treatment components could be clogged and over-saturated, or a pump could be damaged. Call a Maintenance Service Provider immediately in these situations.

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Unequal Distribution

Distribution boxes being utilized in conventional gravity systems over time can malfunction, degrade, and distribute the wastewater unevenly to different portions of the drainfield. The equal distribution of wastewater across the entire drainfield is crucial to properly treating the water and not oversaturating different lines in your drainfield. Have a licensed Maintenance Service Provider perform any distribution box leveling or replacement work.

Ponding or Flooding Drainfield

If large amounts of ponding wastewater are seen in your drainfield observation ports, this may indicate that the soil helping treat and disperse the wastewater is oversaturated. Repeated ponding, flooding and surfacing wastewater from your drainfield may indicate that the soil in your drainfield is no longer useful and drainfield repair or replacement are necessary. In these instances, contact a state-licensed designer to begin the permitting process on any soil evaluations or repair designs.