

**Anne Arundel County  
Department of Public Works**

**A Mayo Homeowner's  
Guide to Septic Tanks**

- \* **operation**
- \* **maintenance**
- \* **repair**
- \* **safety precautions**
- \* **emergencies**

**Septic Tanks Support Sewer  
Systems**

*Your on-site septic tank plays a significant role in the Department of Public Works' overall sewage collection system. With proper operation and regular maintenance, your system will function better and last longer. This brochure explains the role your septic tank plays and provides information to help you maintain troublefree operation.*

The Department of Public Works uses several types of collection systems. Each has been designed to best serve the customer in a particular area. Topography, the physical features of the earth, play an important role in design selection. An on-site septic tank that provides preliminary treatment of the wastewater produced on each individual property. The effluent or liquid from the septic tanks is then pumped into a sewage collection system, which conveys the wastewater to the Mayo Water Reclamation Facility for treatment. The treated effluent is pumped to a discharge point at the mouth of the Rhode River. The special septic tank system servicing your home is part of this larger system serving the Mayo sewer service area.

The septic tank in your yard is an important part of the overall wastewater collection system. In areas where sewage cannot flow downhill by gravity,

pumps are used to force sewage through the lines to the reclamation facility. The Mayo area utilizes both gravity and pressure systems. If your home is one served by a pressure system, a pump removes the sewage from your tank and pushes the sewage through small plastic pipes to the larger lines in the street.

It is important that you know how your home sewer system operates and that you notify the Department of Public Works emergency dispatcher if a problem occurs. If the unit servicing your home is owned by the County, then we will provide maintenance and service to you. If it is a privately maintained system, then you must contact your plumber to resolve the problem.

County owned septic tanks are placed in a utility easement to provide access for maintenance and service. It is not advisable to plant shrubs or place such items as fences, decorative pilings, stones, fish ponds, etc. within the easement as damage to the tank pump or underground electrical or piping systems may occur. The County will not be responsible for any damage to landscaping or items placed within the easement while performing any maintenance function.

If your home is new construction and less than one year old, your septic tank is still under warranty. Any problems you experience with the tank system during that period should be addressed by your builder or your plumber.

**Upgrades and Rehabilitation**

The Bureau of Utility Operations is continually working to improve and upgrade the Mayo wastewater system. An example is the riser retrofit program in which workers replace the current riser and lid with an upgrade. The riser extends from the top of the tank to above the ground and is covered by the lid.

Upgrades, such as this, help the

system work more effectively. Utility workers make visible inspections to insure the system is operating properly, as well as, smoke testing of tanks and piping, flow metering at sewage pump stations, and internal TV of piping.

When you see Utility workers performing upgrades and testing in the property easements surrounding the tanks, in the piping and throughout the collection system, please be as cooperative as possible--the work being performed is designed to improve your sewer system and to minimize the need for costly expansions and upgrades.

**With your cooperation, your septic tank system will provide many years of safe reliable service. Please take a few minutes to read the following information to insure the proper functioning of your system...**

***If you have a pump on your tank and the alarm sounds...***

If there is a pump failure, the tank which contains the pump will become too full. An alarm horn and light located in the alarm box on the outside of your home will automatically turn on. You should:

- **Discontinue water use to prevent overflows.**
- **Turn off the alarm by depressing the alarm light on the front of the alarm box. The alarm horn should silence but the light will remain on until the system is repaired and restored to normal operation.**
- **Wait fifteen minutes before taking further action. A high level of water usage will sometimes cause the alarm to come on. This situation is self-correcting. The tank will automatically be pumped down and the alarm light should turn off.**
- **If fifteen minutes have passed and the alarm light is still on, call our 24 emergency dispatcher at 410-222-8400. The dispatcher will notify you if your system is privately maintained, in which case, you must contact a plumber or electrician.**

- CAUTION: Never attempt to open the tank cover or the electrical panel box. Electrical shock and/or damage to the system could occur!

***Protect Your Septic Tank***

The septic tank can handle any wastewater that is normally discharged to the sewer from the kitchen, bathroom or laundry. Some materials and chemicals are not suitable for disposal in your septic system and may cause operating problems or safety hazards. Following is a list of do's and don'ts that will help you keep your septic system in top operating form.

**DON'TS:**

- Don't connect a sump pump, rain gutters or a garbage disposal to your system.
- CAUTION: Don't attempt to open the tank cover or the electrical panel box. Electrical shock or damage to the system could occur!
- Don't put any of the following materials into sinks, toilets or drains:

- \*Glass, metal, wood, seafood shells
- \* Diapers, socks, rags or cloth of any kind
- \*Plastic objects (toys, eating utensils, etc.)
- \*Any strong chemical, toxic, caustic, or poisonous substance
- \*Degreasing solvents
- \*Any explosive or flammable material
- \*Gasoline, kerosene, fuel oil, paint thinner, antifreeze

- \*Lubricating oil or grease
- \*Cooking fat (lard, oil, grease)
- \*Hair clippings

**These materials will clog or damage your home system or create unsafe conditions in your lines and tanks.**

- Don't drive over the septic tank area with a vehicle or heavy equipment and don't place any permanent construction over the tank.

**DO'S:**

- Do leave the area over and around the septic tank open and free of obstruction
- Do practice water conservation by installing

water saving devices, repairing all leaking toilets and faucets, installing low flow showerheads, etc.

- Do run washing machines and dishwasher only when you have a full load.
- Do familiarize yourself with the location of your septic tank and pump control panel (if provided).

***Technical Details for Tanks with Pumps***

A fiberglass or high density polyethylene septic tank has been installed underground on your property. A sewage pump is housed in the tank. The tank cover, electric box and cleanout pipes are the only parts that show above the ground. All of the wastewater from your home flows into the buried tank. When the tank fills to a pre-set level, the pump automatically turns on and forces the waste out of the tank and into the sewage system.

The pump will automatically turn off when the tank reaches a predetermined level. The pump is programmed to operate in cycles, rather than continuously. Cycles are determined by the amount of water used.

The septic tank pump is powered by electricity and is connected to the electric service lines at a panel box near your electric meter on the outside wall of your house and will be included on your monthly electric bill. The cost of electricity is paid by you, not the County.

***In Case of Power Failure to Tanks with Pumps***

If there is a power failure which affects your home, your septic tank pump will also experience a loss of power and not be able to operate. The septic tank has a certain amount of holding capacity but interior water use should be severely limited until power has been restored.

***Calling for Assistance...***

***For 24-hour EMERGENCY service for water, solid waste, and wastewater emergencies call 410-222-8400 or in South County 410-451-4118. Trained and experienced dispatchers are available to assist you.***

***DPW General Information  
410-222-7500***

***DPW Customer Relations  
410-222-7582***

***Billing Information  
410-222-1144***