

# DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR WATER IS SAFE TO DRINK?



**Leaky septic systems can pollute our inland lakes, streams and Lake Michigan. Leaky septic systems may also pollute your drinking water. Help protect water quality by checking your septic system regularly!**

**Southwest Michigan  
Water Quality  
Coalition**

[www.swmpc.org/water.asp](http://www.swmpc.org/water.asp)

# What Can I Do?

## Tips for Maintaining your Septic System

Septic system failures can occur when wastewater either breaks out at the surface or seeps into the soils and travels to groundwater sources, contaminating the water and threatening public health. Check with the local health department to ensure a safe distance between a septic tank and a drinking water well in areas where water wells and septic systems are used by homeowners.

☔ **Have a professional pump out the septic tank every three to four years** (depending on the household size the period in between pumps will vary – check with local health department for suggestions). Look in the yellow pages for local septic tank and system cleaning and repair companies.

☔ **Check the system when it begins to back up.**

Possible causes of septic system failure include:

- Tank needs to be pumped
- Tree roots have grown into trenches
- Pipe has burst
- Trenches are too wet due to large amounts of rainfall
- Volume of water used is too high\*

\*Water volume can be reduced by using low-flow devices, detecting and repairing leaky faucets and toilets, washing larger loads of laundry instead of many small loads, and eliminating other wasteful water use habits.

### For Assistance Contact Your Local Health Department:

Berrien (269) 926-7121  
Cass (269) 445-5280

## Septic System Do's and Don'ts

### DO

- ☑ Learn the location of your septic tank and drainfield.
- ☑ Have your septic system inspected annually.
- ☑ Call a professional whenever you experience problems with the system.
- ☑ Keep a detailed record of repairs.
- ☑ Conserve water to avoid overloading the system.
- ☑ Divert sources of water, like roof drains, house footing drains, and sump pumps away from the septic system.

### DON'T

- ✗ Go down into a septic tank. Toxic gases are produced by the natural treatment processes in septic tanks and can kill in minutes.
- ✗ Allow anyone to drive or park over any part of the system.
- ✗ Plant over or near the drainfield, except for grass.
- ✗ Dig in your drainfield or build anything over it.
- ✗ Make or allow repairs without obtaining the required health department permit.
- ✗ Allow backwash from home water softeners to enter the septic system.

keep it **BLUE**



only rain in the drain

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For additional information visit the U.S. EPA  
Septic Systems webpage:

<http://cfpub.epa.gov/owm/septic/home.cfm>