

Lake Wise Info Sheet



Shoreland Best Management Practices for Lake-friendly Living

Benefits

-  Water Quality
-  Protection & Resiliency

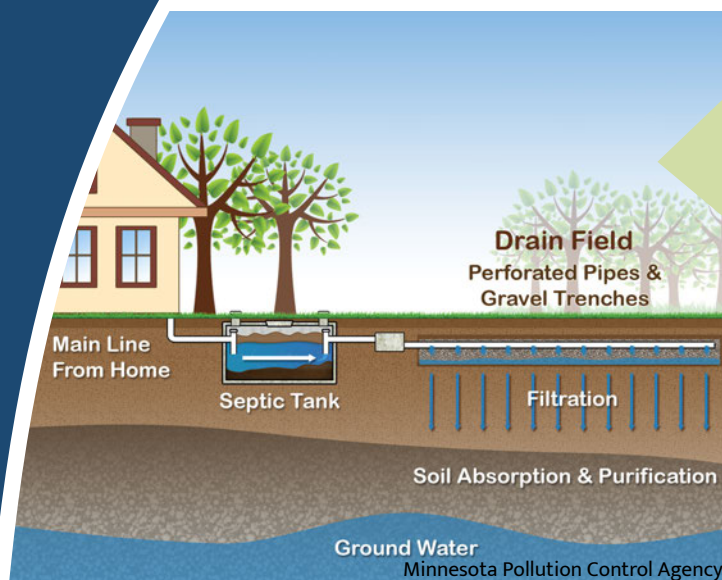
VT DEC suggested BMPs for wastewater systems. Visit the VT Agency of Natural Resources Drinking Water & Groundwater Protection Division for more information: www.septic.vt.gov

Related Info Sheets:

Alternative Wastewater Systems

WASTEWATER SYSTEM HEALTH

A guide to lakeshore onsite wastewater



Typical wastewater system with septic tank and leachfield.

Wastewater System Best Management Practices (BMPs)

-  **Know Your Septic Tank & Pump It Regularly:** Locate your septic tank and access ports. Inspect tank regularly to check for problems and determine how quickly solids and scum accumulate. Pump out tank regularly as needed to prevent clogs, typically every 1-5 years, depending on usage frequency, type of system, and professional advice. Clean the effluent filter annually. Optional: Install risers over the access ports to provide easier access for inspections, pumping, and filter cleaning.
-  **Know Your Leachfield & Keep It Clear:** Leachfields should be kept clear of woody trees and shrubs - maintain as herbaceous plant cover only, e.g., grass or meadow. Divert runoff from gutter downspouts or driveways away from leachfield. Do not drive or build on system!
-  **Take Care of Your System:** Limit what goes into the system - avoid grease, trash, or harmful chemicals down the drain. Repair or replace leaking plumbing fixtures - water conservation extends the life of your system!

Description

Onsite wastewater systems (often referred to as septic systems) provide treatment for wastewater from homes and camps, resulting in clean water returning to the water table. A healthy system contains solids (sludge on bottom) and scum (grease and oil that float on top) in a septic tank. Wastewater is then transported to a soil-based treatment system (leachfield), where it is exposed to an aerobic microbe environment. The process of water filtering through soils returns it to a potable state once it reaches groundwater. Knowing how to assess and care for your system will ensure efficient use and prevent failure and contamination to the lake. Properly functioning wastewater systems keep the lake safe for humans and wildlife!

Inspection Don'ts

Don't turn off pumps or other electrical components, they are key and necessary parts of the system.

Don't dye test the system - the water flows from a dye test can overstress a system that was functioning and potentially cause it to fail.

Don't substitute additives for a septic tank pump out - they have not been shown to be an effective replacement.

One sink dripping once a second will add 5 gallons a day to your system!



VERMONT

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
WATERSHED MANAGEMENT DIVISION

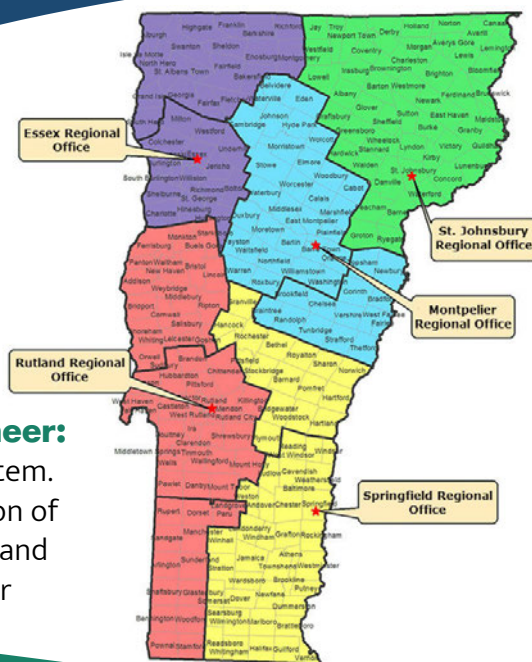


Do You Still Have Questions?

Look Up Your Permit: You can search for your wastewater permit online! See permit search guide.

Search for a VT Licensed Wastewater Designer or Engineer:

Hire a professional to inspect the system. They will research the size and location of system components, expected flows, and functionality of the leachfield. Hire for design or permitting help.



The Drinking Water & Groundwater Protection Division of the VT DEC works with landowners, designers, and engineers to permit potable water and wastewater systems, protecting Vermont's land and water for all. Contact your Regional Office for design assistance and permitting questions.

Failed Wastewater System 101

Wastewater systems can fail for a wide variety of reasons, not all of them controllable. Signs of a failed system:

- 💧 Wastewater backing up into your toilets, tubs, or sinks.
- 💧 Slow-draining fixtures, especially following a storm event.
- 💧 Smell of sewage, especially with soggy ground or water discharging over the leachfield or in a nearby ditch.
- 💧 Flashing light or beeping alarm indicating a pump is not working or wastewater levels are too high.

If you suspect you have a failed system, contact a VT Licensed Designer or Engineer to examine your system and determine potential fixes, which may be simple. Anything beyond a minor problem will require a permit from the **Drinking Water & Groundwater Protection Program**. Failed system permits will specify a date for the new system to be installed.

Lake-friendly Wastewater Practices

Conserve Water

Use less, particularly in the spring and after a major storm event, or install low-flow plumbing fixtures to put less stress on your system and the lake.

Hook Up Grey Water

Grey water systems are not permitted in Vermont. They can add harmful discharges of nutrients, bacteria, and other pathogens into the lake. If you have a grey water system, consider tying it into your wastewater system.

Use Biodegradable Soaps

It is best to not use any soaps in water that will reach the lake. If soap must be used outdoors, use eco-friendly, phosphate-free soaps. Ensure proper drainage of any outdoor water source to prevent runoff into the lake.

Failed Wastewater **Do's**

- Do** conserve water until repair is complete.
- Do** fence off area where wastewater is surfacing to keep people and animals out.
- Do** place hay bales around the problem area to redirect water away from surface water.

Failed Wastewater **Don'ts**

- Don't** ignore the problem! It could turn into a large and costly one if not dealt with.
- Don't** stress a system to see if it has failed.
- Don't** attempt to repair a system yourself.
- Don't** bury the problem area under more soil, this will not make the problem go away and may cause additional issues.
- Don't** redirect wastewater to a ditch, storm drain, stream, old well, or any other waterway. It is illegal and can cause serious environmental and health hazards.

