



## “OWNER’S MANUAL” FOR A ONSITE WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEMS (OWTS)

Your septic tank and/or drainfield was a substantial investment that should last for decades if it is *used properly and maintained regularly*. Its life can be extended significantly if you follow a few simple guidelines:



**Fats, Oils and Greases (FOGs) are BAD!** Minimize the amount of FOG that goes down the drain. These can clog pipes on the way to the septic tank causing overflow or backup. FOGs that get washed down into the drainfield, can clog the pipes and soil. Collect all oils and dispose in the garbage. Use the disposal sparingly or not at all; food particles can also be washed into the drainfield.



**Kitchen Waste:** FOGs and solids that make it past the septic tank are a big culprit for drainfield failure. If your tank is undersized it is recommended that you upgrade the capacity of your septic tank and take care to prevent FOGs from being introduced into the system.



**Avoid excessive water use**, which can overwhelm any drainfield. The soil can only absorb the water so fast before the water starts to fill up the trench.



**Regular septic tank pumping** is a preventive measure. Pumping every 3-5 years is recommended to prevent sludge from getting into the drainfield.



**Chemicals:** Avoid putting any caustic chemicals, disinfectants, or bleach down the drain. The bacteria in the septic tank are a good thing, and essential for breaking down the organic matter in the tank.



**Check regularly for plumbing leaks!** A leaking toilet can send 200 gallons of water a day into your septic system!



**Water Softeners:** Use only a water softener that uses replaceable cartridges. The brine from self-regenerating water softeners will clog the pores in the soil, preventing absorption.



**Diversion Valves:** If you have more than one system, switch the diversion valve between your two drainfields every 8 months. This gives each system time to rest. You can have a septic contractor do this or have them teach you how to maintain it yourself.



**Do not park vehicles over your drainfield.** This compacts the soil, preventing oxygen from reaching the wastewater, which then prevents proper bacterial action. In wet weather, cars have even been known to sink into the trench.



**Do not plant trees** or food producing gardens above your leachfield. Trees are a big concern for OWTS since tree roots can quickly fill the perforated pipe in septic trenches. Tree roots can also infiltrate a septic tank and damage its structural integrity.



**Save your Repair Area!** Many properties in Monterey County have limited area for a future drainfield. Take precautions to protect your repair area by not planting trees, paving the area or building walls.

In summary, Environmental Health Bureau highly recommends that you take precautions with what goes into your OWTS to prevent failure. Even the newest OWTS in quality soil requires gentle use, as long-time country dwellers know all too well. Be conscious of your water use and use common-sense ways to conserve water.