

# SepticSmart- Panel Discussion



Kristine Rendon, MDEQ

Lucus Pols, Kalamazoo County Environmental Health

Danielle Gerdes, Scott's Excavating

Beth Clawson, MSU Extension

MDNR Content

Dave Cotton for MOWRA

Who here has heard about  
SepticSmart?

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# What is SepticSmart?



- Annual promotion through EPA focusing on outreach activities to encourage homeowners and communities to care for and maintain their septic systems.
- During SepticSmart week, EPA seeks to inform homeowners on proper septic system care and maintenance, assist local agencies in promoting homeowner education and awareness, and educate local decision makers about infrastructure options to improve and sustain their communities.

For more information visit:

<https://www.epa.gov/septic/septicmart-week>

Or

<https://www.michigan.gov/deqsepticmart>

# Do Your Part. Be SepticSmart!





## SepticSmart in Michigan



**Save the Date:**  
**September 16-20, 2019**



[www.epa.gov/septic/septic-systems-outreach-toolkit](http://www.epa.gov/septic/septic-systems-outreach-toolkit)  
[www.michigan.gov/deq/septicmart](http://www.michigan.gov/deq/septicmart)

The U.S. EPA- in conjunction with federal, state and local governments, and private sector partners- will kick off the annual SepticSmart Week (September 16-20, 2019) to encourage American homeowners and communities to properly maintain their septic systems. For more information visit: [www.epa.gov/septic](http://www.epa.gov/septic)

Michigan has a vision to protect and promote the wise use of its globally unique water sources. Proper septic system maintenance protects public health, the environment, and saves the homeowner money through avoided costly repairs. The SepticSmart Program educates homeowners about proper septic system care and maintenance all year long. In addition, it serves as an online resource for industry practitioners, local governments, and community organizations, providing access to tools to educate clients and residents.

For free downloads of these graphics go to [www.michigan.gov/donosepticmart](http://www.michigan.gov/donosepticmart) or email DEQ Onsite Wastewater Staff: Dale Ladouceur: [ladouceur@michigan.gov](mailto:ladouceur@michigan.gov); Dave Coffon: [cotford@michigan.gov](mailto:cotford@michigan.gov); Kristine Rendow: [rendow@michigan.gov](mailto:rendow@michigan.gov); Rob Wolff: [wolfr@michigan.gov](mailto:wolfr@michigan.gov)



### **MDEQ Minute Video: Septic Systems**

The MDEQ Onsite Wastewater Program explains how septic systems work and why proper maintenance is important to the protection of public health, our Great Lakes and the environment.

You can find this video on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/JNOpFo7Cx4A>



### **SepticSmart Postcard**

Reminder to get your tanks pumped. Space available for personal business information.



### **Do Your Part Get SepticSmart Flyer**

Protect It and Inspect It. Reminding homeowners to have system inspected every three years and tanks pumped every three to five years.



### **SepticSmart Dos and Don'ts for an Advanced Treatment Unit (ATU)**

Flyer explaining what is an ATU and why would a homeowner need an ATU versus a traditional septic system? Additionally, explains what the required maintenance on an ATU with a list of Dos and Don'ts.

## SepticSmart in Michigan



### **A Homeowner' Guide to Septic Systems**

Download and print an 8-page informational booklet to help a homeowner understand what a Septic System is and the importance of maintaining this system.



### **New Homebuyer's Guide to Septic Systems**

A double-sided print-out into a four-page brochure for basic information of owning a home with a septic system.

Space available for personal business information.



### **Proper Landscaping on and Around Your Septic System**

A flyer to help educate homeowners on the importance of keeping your septic system out of harm's way. Landscaping do's and don'ts over your drainfield.



### **On a septic system? When is the last time you thought about it?**

**Door Hanger**      **Brochure**

Can be used to notify homeowners about inspecting their septic tank and the importance of pumping. With five Septic Tips on the back. Comes in door hanger style or a mail insert style.



### **Top 10 Ways to Be a Good Septic Owner**

Checklist handout to educate homeowners of how to maintain their septic systems by listing the top 10 ways to ensure a healthy system.



### **SepticSmart Week Social Media Guide**

Contains material and information you can use to advertise and promote SepticSmart Week. Includes basic social media messages and outreach messages and methods to track messages, and news release examples.

Visit: [www.michigan.gov/septicmart](http://www.michigan.gov/septicmart) or [www.epa.gov/septic](http://www.epa.gov/septic) for more information.

This message is promoted through many free printable resources through EPA...



ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE OF MICHIGAN  
I, Rick Snyder, governor of Michigan, do hereby proclaim  
September 17-21, 2018

## SepticSmart Week

**WHEREAS**, proper septic system use and routine care are vital to protecting public health, preserving our highly valued groundwater, lakes, streams and waterways, and avoiding costly repairs that can result from neglect; and,

**WHEREAS**, over 1.3 million septic systems in Michigan treat wastewater from homes and businesses; and,

**WHEREAS**, wastewater professionals in the state of Michigan use their expertise in the design, installation, maintenance, and regulation of septic systems; and,

**WHEREAS**, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's SepticSmart program used by Michigan health officials educates homeowners about the need for proper septic system use and routine maintenance; and,

**WHEREAS**, residents and the environment of Michigan greatly benefit from properly designed, installed, operated, and maintained septic systems;

**NOW, THEREFORE**, I, Rick Snyder, Governor of Michigan, do hereby proclaim September 17-21, 2018 as Septic Smart Week.



A blue ink signature of Rick Snyder, the Governor of Michigan, is written over a horizontal line.



# Michigan Promoting SepticSmart Week

Governor Snyder signed the State of Michigan SepticSmart Week 2018 Proclamation.



Michigan Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association

### Proclamation

WHEREAS, part of the mission of the Michigan Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association is to promote the proper design, construction, operation and maintenance of onsite wastewater systems, referred hereafter as septic systems; and

WHEREAS, proper septic system use and routine care are vital to protecting public health, preserving our highly valued groundwater, lakes, streams and waterways, and avoiding costly repairs that can result from neglect; and

WHEREAS, nearly 1.3 million of septic systems in Michigan treat wastewater from homes and businesses; and

WHEREAS, wastewater professionals in the state of Michigan use their expertise in the design, installation, maintenance and regulation of septic systems in; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's SepticSmart program used by Michigan health officials and professionals does educate homeowners about the need for proper septic system use and routine maintenance; and

WHEREAS, residents and the environment of Michigan benefit from properly designed, installed, operated, and maintained septic systems;

NOW THEREFORE, I, Larry D. Stephens, on behalf of the Michigan Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association do hereby proclaim the week of September 17-21, 2018 as

### SepticSmart Week

The Michigan Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association urges all people to join us in this special observance and do all they can to promote this worthy mission.



Signed this 20<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2018

Larry D. Stephens, PE, President



### Proclamation

WHEREAS, proper septic system use and routine care are vital to protecting public health, preserving our highly valued groundwater, lakes, streams and waterways, and avoiding costly repairs that can result from neglect; and

WHEREAS, nearly 1.3 million of septic systems in Michigan treat wastewater from homes and businesses; and

WHEREAS, wastewater professionals in the State of Michigan use their expertise in the design, installation, maintenance and regulation of septic systems; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's SepticSmart program used by Michigan health officials educates homeowners about the need for proper septic system use and routine maintenance; and

WHEREAS, residents and the environment of Michigan benefit from properly designed, installed, operated, and maintained septic systems;

NOW THEREFORE, I, Dave Snyder, President of the Michigan Septic Tank Association do hereby proclaim the week of September 17-21, 2018 as

### SepticSmart Week

and on behalf of the Michigan Septic Tank Association, I urge all people to join us in this special observance.

Signed this 8/28/18

  
Dave W. Snyder (MSTA President)

### Proclamation

WHEREAS, proper septic system use and routine care are vital to protecting public health, preserving our highly valued groundwater, lakes, streams and waterways, and avoiding costly repairs that can result from neglect; and

WHEREAS, Michigan has over one million onsite septic systems that treat wastewater from homes and businesses; and

WHEREAS, Michigan Conservation Districts are the local providers of natural resource management services that help our citizens conserve their lands and our environment for a cleaner, healthier, economically stronger Michigan.

WHEREAS, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's SepticSmart program is used by Michigan Conservation Districts to educate homeowners about the need for proper septic system use and routine maintenance; and

WHEREAS, residents and the environment of Michigan benefit from properly designed, installed, operated, and maintained septic systems;

NOW THEREFORE, the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts do hereby proclaim the week of September 17-21, 2018 as

### SepticSmart Week

The Michigan Association of Conservation Districts and the 75 Conservation District members, urge Michigan citizens to join us in this special observance.

Art Pelon, President  
Michigan Association of Conservation Districts  
August 31, 2018



### Proclamation

WHEREAS, proper septic system use and routine care are vital to protecting public health, preserving our highly valued groundwater, lakes, streams and waterways, and avoiding costly repairs that can result from neglect; and

WHEREAS, nearly 1.3 million septic systems in Michigan treat wastewater from homes and businesses; and

WHEREAS, Environmental Health professionals of Michigan use their expertise in the design, installation, maintenance and regulation of septic systems; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's SepticSmart program used by Michigan health officials does educate homeowners about the need for proper septic system use and routine maintenance; and

WHEREAS, residents and the environment of Michigan benefit from properly designed, installed, operated, and maintained septic systems;

NOW THEREFORE, I, Connor Wickham, on behalf of the Northern Michigan Environmental Health Association do hereby proclaim the week of September 17-21, 2018 as

### SepticSmart Week

The Northern Michigan Environmental Health Association urges all people to join us in this special observance.

Signed this September 12, 2018

Connor Wickham, Chair  
Northern Michigan Environmental Health Association



# Additional Support Through Local Proclamations...

MOWRA, MSTA, MACD, NMEHA

# Statewide Promotional Effort!

Supported by multiple agencies:

- Seminars
- News Releases
- Social Media
- Mass Emails
- Mass Mailings
- Webinars
- Linking to additional resources on Webpages
- Handouts



# Local Health Department Support

**Lucus Pols:** *Kalamazoo County Environmental Health*







# Kalamazoo County Environmental Health Septic Smart Week Outreach

Lucus Pols, REHS, Environmental Health Supervisor

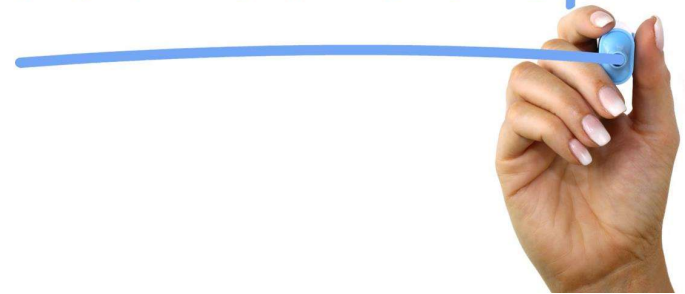


Health & Community Services Department

# 2018 Well and Septic 101

- First year doing a 101 Seminar
- Geared to homeowners, builders, excavators, realtors
- What information is really important?
- Logical choice was during Septic Smart Week!

KNOWLEDGE





# Advertising

- Facebook
- Sent with septic and well permits and finals
- Sent with complaints!
- Libraries, township halls
- Flyers and Postcards



Kalamazoo County  
Health &  
Community  
Services - HCS  
@KalamazooCountyHCS

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Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services - HCS

September 18 · 🌐

## WELL AND SEPTIC 101

DATE: 09/19/2018  
TIME: 6PM  
Registration is from 5:30-6:00

Location:  
Kalamazoo County Expo Center  
Conference Room A  
2900 Lake St, Kalamazoo, MI



Attention homeowners, realtors,  
builders or anyone else who  
wants to learn the basics about  
water wells and sewage treatment systems:

Kalamazoo County Environmental Health is hosting an informa-  
tional seminar to educate the public about the function, mainte-  
nance and regulations regarding onsite water supply and sewage  
treatment systems.

Join us to learn the answers to these questions and  
more:

- Where does your drinking water come from?
- How often should I test?
- Where does my gray water and black water go?
- How often should I pump my septic tank?
- What is the function of an alternator valve?

For more information contact us at:

Phone: 269-373-5337

E-mail: [ehincoming@kalcounty.com](mailto:ehincoming@kalcounty.com)

### Don't Miss this Opportunity!

If you are a homeowner and would like a drawing and brief con-  
sultation regarding your water supply or sewage treatment sys-  
tem during the Well and Septic 101 seminar, call to pre-register  
over the phone and we will provide you with any pertinent infor-  
mation that our office has available.

Call 269-373-5337

Kalamazoo County Health & Community  
Services is committed to providing equi-  
table, culturally competent care to all  
individuals served, regardless of race,  
age, sex, color, national origin, religion,  
height, weight, marital status, political  
affiliation, sexual orientation, gender  
identity, or disability.



# Evening Activity

- 6:00-8:00 PM
- All staff played a part!
- No RSVP's



# Agenda and Topics Covered

- What is Environmental Health?
  - Food Safety, Land Water and Wastewater, Lab, Household Hazardous Waste
- What is a Sewage Treatment System?
  - Basics – septic tanks and drainfields
  - Failure
  - Permitting and Inspection
- What is a Water Well/Groundwater Contamination?
  - Basics – Water Well and components
  - Permitting and Inspection
  - Abandonment/Plugging
  - Groundwater Contamination
- Questions





Start the Clock!!!



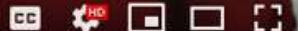
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
[www.epa.gov/septic](http://www.epa.gov/septic)

**DEQ** Onsite Wastewater  
[www.michigan.gov/deqsepticSMART](http://www.michigan.gov/deqsepticSMART)



Play (k)

0:19 / 1:34







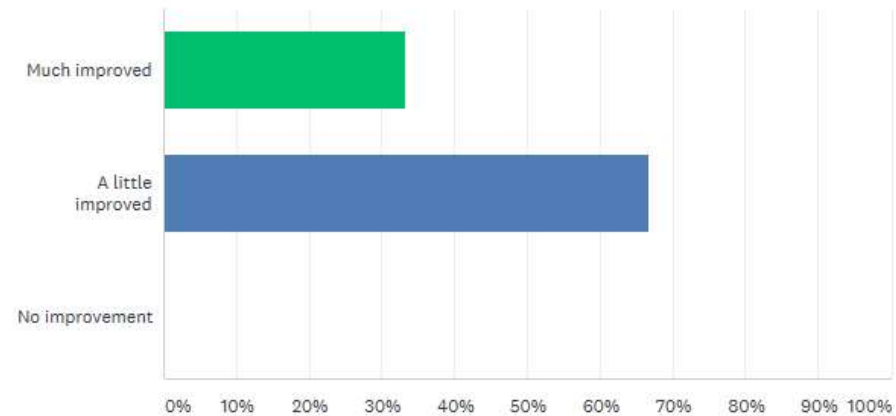


# Results

- 22 attended
- Mostly homeowners
- Good questions
- New septic owners
- Survey Monkey (6 responses)

How much has your knowledge of Kalamazoo County Environmental Health's role in relation to Sewage Treatment Systems & Drinking Water Wells improved?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0





# Takeaway

- Will do it again this year
- Great to work with state partners
- Will create new advertising and begin sending out January



# 2019 Ideas

- Different activity
- Advertise even sooner!
- Videos (Animaker)





**Septic Tank (ST) / Pump Chamber (PC)**

Total ST Capacity Required (gallons): **1000**

Effluent Filter in Septic Tank: **Recommended**

Pump / Pump Chamber: **Not Required**

**Absorption System Requirements**

Absorption System Type: **Trenches**

System Size (square feet): **800**

**Stone Requirements (Trenches / Drainedbeds Only)**

2 inches 6A stone level across 4 inch drain pipe

6 inches 6A stone below 4 inch drain pipe

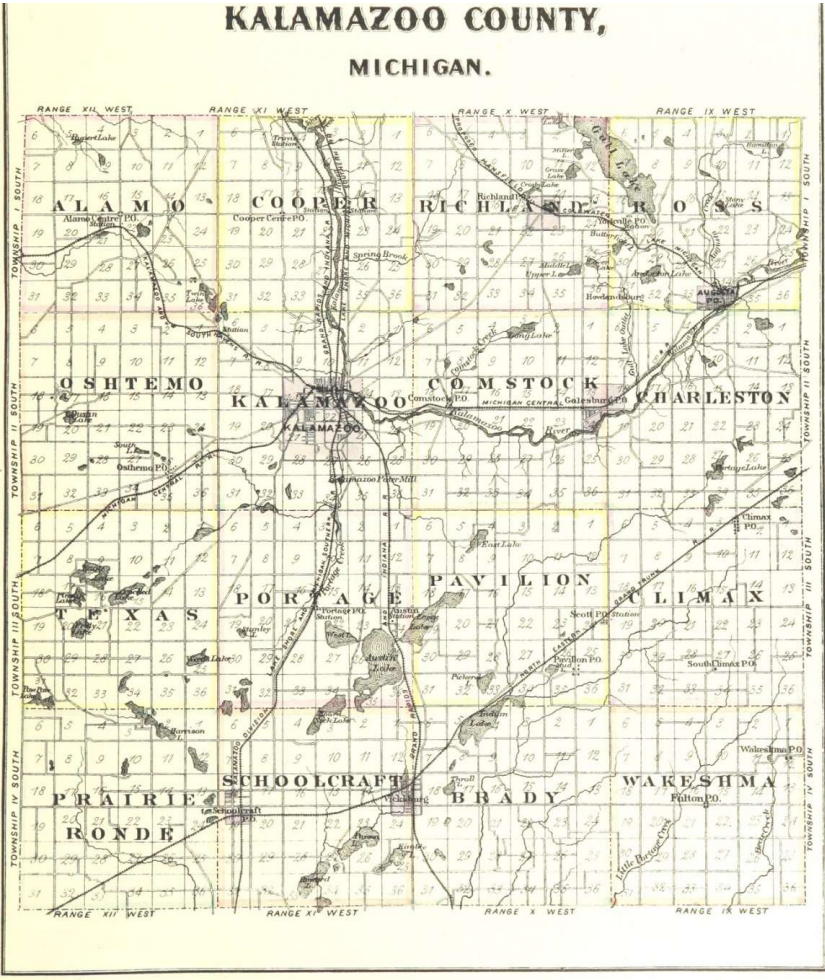
**Soil Cover over Absorption System**

6 inches minimum      24 inches maximum

36 inches maximum bottom depth of absorption system




Thank you!





# Pumper Perspective

**Danielle Gerdes:** *Scott's Excavating*





# SEPTICSMART FROM A PUMPER'S PERSPECTIVE

**Danielle Gerdes**  
September 18

This week has been designated SepticSmart Week by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). If your wastewater disposal system is not sewer, chances are that it's septic system. When was the last time your septic tank(s) was serviced? More than 5 years ago? Call a licensed septage hauler today! Scott's Excavating, Roscommon, MI 989-275-5011 #environmentalprotection #septicystems #epa #cleanaquifer #michiganseptictankassociation #ScottsExcavatingRoscommonMI

**Do Your Part Get SepticSmart**

- Think at the Sink
- Don't Strain Your Drains
- Don't Overload the Commode
- Shield Your Field
- Test Your Well

Septic Tank, Groundwater Recharge, Well, Aquifer

**Protect It and Inspect It—Have your system inspected every three years and have your tank pumped every three to five years.**

- **Think at the Sink:** Avoid pouring fats, grease and solids down the drain.
- **Don't Overload the Commode:** Only put things in the drain or toilet that belong there.
- **Don't Strain Your Drains:** Be water efficient and spread out water use.
- **Shield Your Field:** Remind guests not to park or drive on a system's drainfield, where the weight could cause damage.
- **Test Your Well:** If you're on a well, test the water annually.

Zach Gerdes, Katie Moore and 6 others 1 Comment 7 Shares

Like Comment Share

**Chris Scott** Good way to get your crap in order!  
Like · Reply · 10w

Write a comment...

**Danielle Gerdes**  
September 19

It's the middle of SepticSmart Week! Have you heard of "Advanced Treatment Units"? These septic systems use different effluent treatment technology than the traditional perforated pipe in a stone distribution field. In Northern Michigan, Advanced Treatment Units (ATU) are often used when a property does not have enough space to allow for a traditional system, like in some of our local Higgins Lake subdivisions that contain very small lots. ATUs are also used nationwide to provide wastewater treatment in some of the following situations: unforgiving heavy soils (like clay), little soil cover over bedrock, high seasonal water table, or steep terrain.

A BIG THANKS to all Michigan Department of Environmental Quality personnel, Michigan Health Department personnel, and septic system installers who have taken the time and effort to become educated on ATUs and encouraged their use in seemingly impossible installation conditions. Without you, some of us might be using fancy 5 gallon pails.

#loveytoilet #AdvancedTreatmentUnit #loveysinks #MDEQ #loveywasher #MichiganAssociationForLocalPublicHealth #loveyshower #MichiganSepticTankAssociation #loveydishwasher

**SepticSmart Dos and Don'ts for an Advanced Treatment Unit (ATU)**

**What is an ATU?**  
Advanced Treatment Units (ATUs) are designed to be an individual wastewater system. They are designed to be used in areas where traditional septic systems are not suitable due to a higher degree than a traditional septic system.

**Why would I need or want an ATU versus a traditional septic system?**  
ATUs are used in many states to address a higher quality wastewater than what traditional septic tanks can handle. They are necessary in some areas — either because of the complexity of the environment, or because of the conditions. ATUs are also designed to reduce odors, leachate, and other pollutants from septic systems.

**What is the required maintenance?**  
As with all septic systems, an ATU's proper functioning relies on regular maintenance. This is an advanced concept, and ATUs require more maintenance than a traditional septic system.

To ensure proper functioning, most manufacturers require annual operation, maintenance, monitoring and repair. A professional or the manufacturer's "septic specialist" should perform these services. For the ATU manufacturer's maintenance schedule, see the manufacturer's manual. The ATU manufacturer's maintenance schedule is provided to ensure they are kept up with the manufacturer's treatment system.

In addition to the **SepticSmart** and **SepticSmart** ATUs have some additional dos and don'ts because of their advanced parts.

**Follow Septic Smart's ATU dos and don'ts:**

- Do's:**
  - Test all of your septic devices annually.
  - Maintain the ATU manufacturer's maintenance schedule.
  - Maintain, clean or repair any system components without your approval.
  - Place the ATU-related service provider (septic tank) in a location that is accessible to you.
- Don'ts:**
  - Use soap and detergents that are too harsh, bleach, ammonia, or other strong chemicals.
  - Flush baby formula.
  - Use too many antibiotics in the garden.
  - Use too many antibiotics in the garden.
  - Use too many antibiotics in the garden.
  - Use too many antibiotics in the garden.

For more SepticSmart Dec. visit [www.epa.gov/septic](http://www.epa.gov/septic)  
#EPA

Bill Baker, Zach Gerdes and 1 other 4 Shares

Like Comment Share

Write a comment...

**Danielle Gerdes**  
September 20

Today's SepticSmart topic is all about leaks. Have you ignored that slightly annoying slow drip in your sink or bathtub fixture, thinking that a little drop every 2 seconds isn't worth having a plumber out? Think again! That one slow leak can add nearly 4-1/2 gallons of water per day to your septic tank. While this may not seem like a lot, that 4-1/2 gallons of water will slowly but continuously make its way into your drain field, never giving the field a chance to dry out. A continuously wet drain field has a heightened risk of "hydraulic overload," a condition in which a drain field is completely saturated and unable to accept more effluent water. Hydraulic overload ranks among the top causes of failed septic systems and is, therefore, a primary contributor to very localized environmental pollution. In addition to underground pollution, hydraulic overloading often causes septage to sit on the surface of a lawn. Don't let the dog or kids out to play in that puddle!

Still not convinced you should call in the plumber? Consider this... the cost for preventative septic care with a plumber is likely to be in the low hundreds (\$\$\$), whereas the cost to replace a failed septic field can range from the low thousands (\$\$\$\$) to the ten thousands, (\$\$\$\$\$) depending on where you live. Ouch, that leak hurts!

#plumbersrock #leakywallet #canyougrowmoneytree #MichiganSepticTankAssociation #plumbingheatingcoolingcontractorsassociation

**Did you know?**  
Common household leaks can add hundreds of extra gallons of water every day, stressing your septic system.

Zach Gerdes, Lori Gulick Mattingly and 1 other 2 Shares

Like Comment Share

Write a comment...

# USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- WHAT?
- WHEN?
- HOW / WHERE?

**Danielle Gerdes**  
September 18 ·

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**Do Your Part Get SepticSmart**

Think at the Sink  
Don't Strain Your Drains  
Don't Overload the Commode  
Shield Your Field  
Well  
Test Your Well  
Septic Tank  
Groundwater Recharge  
Aquifer

**Protect It and Inspect It—Have your system inspected every three years and have your tank pumped every three to five years.**

- **Think at the Sink:** Avoid pouring fats, grease and solids down the drain.
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- **Test Your Well:** If you're on a well, test the water annually.

Zach Gerdes, Katie Moore and 6 others · 1 Comment 7 Shares

**Like** **Comment** **Share**

**Chris Scott** Good way to get your crap in order!  
Like · Reply · 10w · 1

Write a comment...



# MESSAGE GOAL?

- (1) EDUCATIONAL
- (2) GENERAL ADVERTISING
- (3) COMPANY-SPECIFIC ADVERTISING

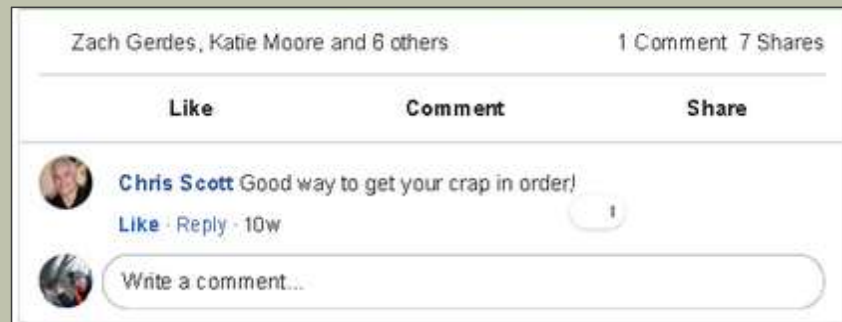
# BENEFITS & ADVANTAGES

- FREE ADVERTISING RESOURCES
- LIMITED TIME EXPENDITURE
- EASE OF USE
- AESTHETIC APPEAL



# PROBLEMS & HURDLES

- LIMITED ONLINE RESPONSE



- LITTLE TIME TO ADEQUATELY PREPARE
  - LACK OF CONSISTENCY

# SEPTICSMART WEEK 2019

## PLAN OF ACTION & CHANGES

- (1) PLAN AHEAD
- (2) TAKE ADVANTAGE
- (3) CONSISTENCY, CONSISTENCY
- (4) EXPAND WEB USE
- (5) MAKE USE OF THE CUTE FACTOR
- (6) COMMUNITY AID - HLF

# SEPTICSMART FROM A PUMPER'S PERSPECTIVE

Thanks for listening!



# Departmental Support

*Michigan Department of Natural Resources: Parks and Recreation*



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# 2018 Wastewater Education Campaign

DNR Parks and Recreation Division

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## Be wastewater smart!



Chemical-based tank deodorizers containing formaldehyde, metals or other harmful chemicals are a **major cause for concern** in wastewater disposal.

Harsh chemicals destroy beneficial microorganisms that break down sewage waste.

Formaldehyde is an EPA-recognized carcinogen.

Chemical presence in wastewater can cause **soil and groundwater contamination, septic system failures** and threaten nearby surface waters and water supply wells.

Restoration of contaminated soils and water is expensive and time consuming.

If a septic system fails, we may be forced to **close the sanitation station** until the problem can be corrected.

To prevent future problems, please read **what you can do** to help us control the hazardous chemicals entering our wastewater systems.



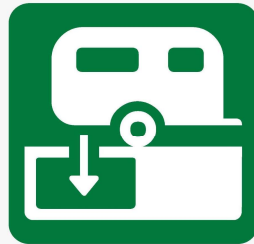
**No harsh chemicals  
ECO-friendly**

More info at [michigan.gov/stateparks](http://michigan.gov/stateparks)



## Do your part, be wastewater smart!

Use biodegradable (enzyme or bacterial-based) tank deodorizers.



**No harsh chemicals  
ECO-friendly**

Adding chemical-based deodorizers to sewage holding tanks in campers may result in the pollution of soil and groundwater (when discharged), corrosion of pipes/tanks and the production of toxic fumes.

**Keep it green!**

## Campers, are your deodorizers safe?



Some holding tank deodorizers contain harmful chemicals that can threaten our resources.

### Here's what you can do:

- **Use restroom facilities in parks and rest stops** (while traveling) as often as possible.
- **Read labels carefully** and use biodegradable (enzyme or bacterial-based) tank deodorizers only.
- Follow deodorizer label directions and **add only what is recommended**.
- **Empty holding tanks only when they are full** to decrease the negative chemical effects on septic systems.
- **Frequent cleaning and properly maintaining** your black and grey tanks will help minimize odors.
- **Tell other campers and boaters** about using only biodegradable (enzyme or bacterial-based) tank deodorizers.



**PARK HERE**

[michigan.gov/stateparks](http://michigan.gov/stateparks)

# In-Person Campaign

New Policy

**Non-Registered  
Campers**

**\$10.00 FEE**



**DUMP OR FILL**



**Do your part,  
be wastewater smart!**

Adding harsh chemicals to wastewater in sewage holding tanks may result in

- pollution of soil and groundwater
- corrosion of pipes and tanks
- toxic fumes

For more information, visit [www.epa.gov/septic](http://www.epa.gov/septic)



**Do your part,  
be wastewater smart!**

- Read labels carefully
- Use biodegradable holding tank deodorizers

For more information, visit [www.michigan.gov/stateparks](http://www.michigan.gov/stateparks)



**Do your part,  
be wastewater smart!**

Chemical presence in wastewater can cause soil and groundwater contamination and restoration can be expensive. To learn more about prevention, visit [www.michigan.gov/stateparks](http://www.michigan.gov/stateparks)



# Online Campaign

# Memorial Day

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**Do your part,  
be wastewater smart!**

Adding harsh chemicals to wastewater in sewage holding tanks may result in

- pollution of soil and groundwater
- corrosion of pipes and tanks
- toxic fumes

For more information, visit [www.epa.gov/septic](http://www.epa.gov/septic)





# Independence Day

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**Do your part,  
be wastewater smart!**

- Read labels carefully
- Use biodegradable holding tank deodorizers

For more information, visit  
[www.michigan.gov/stateparks](http://www.michigan.gov/stateparks)



# Labor Day

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# Additional Online Resources

## Campers, are your deodorizers safe?

Adding chemical-based deodorizers to sewage holding tanks in campers may result in the pollution of soil and groundwater, corrosion of pipes and tanks, and the production of toxic fumes.



### Here's what you can do:

- Use restroom facilities in parks and rest stops (while traveling) as often as possible.
- Read labels carefully and use biodegradable (enzyme or bacterial-based) tank deodorizers only.
- Follow deodorizer label directions and add only what is recommended.
- Empty holding tanks only when they are full to decrease the negative chemical effects on septic systems.
- Frequent cleaning and properly maintaining your black and grey tanks will help minimize odors.
- Tell other campers and boaters about using only biodegradable (enzyme or bacterial-based) tank deodorizers.

### Be wastewater smart!

- Chemical-based tank deodorizers containing formaldehyde, metals or other harmful chemicals are a major cause for concern in wastewater disposal.
- Harsh chemicals destroy beneficial microorganisms that break down sewage waste.
- Formaldehyde is an EPA-recognized carcinogen.
- Chemical presence in wastewater can cause soil and groundwater contamination, septic system failures and threaten nearby surface waters and water supply wells.
- Restoration of contaminated soils and water is expensive and time consuming.
- If a septic system fails, we may be forced to close the sanitation station until the problem can be corrected.
- To prevent future problems, read labels carefully and avoid harsh chemicals when possible. Learn more with the resources below.

### Additional Resources:

- [Safe Wastewater Disposal for RV, Boat, and Mobile Home Owners and Operators](#)
- [Do Your Part, Be Septic Smart](#)
- [Onsite Wastewater](#)
- [SepticSmart](#)
- [RV Holding-tank Treatments & Deodorizers in Septic Systems](#)
- [Chemical Toilet Products Advisory for Consumers](#)

## RELATED CONTENT

Love to run? Tell us your favorite routes!

Gift Cards

These Goods are Good for Michigan

Recycling in State Parks

Friends of the State Parks



Operation &  
Maintenance of Large  
Onsite Sewage  
Treatment Systems

# In the Classroom





## Future Goals

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- Continue in-person campaign for 2019
- Expand social media outreach efforts
- Engage the public and RV industry at upcoming events
- Expand classroom opportunities for operation and maintenance of critical infrastructure



# Academia Support

**Beth Clawson:** *MSU Extension*



# Septic safe Week 2018:

## *Actions and Support*

Beth Clawson, MSU Extension



# Online webinar for homeowners

MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY

## Onsite Sewage Treatment Webinar: Maintaining Your System

- Protect The Environment
- Protect Your Health
- Protect Your Investment

Terry Gibb & Beth Clawson  
Extension Educators



2

- Free registration
- Three parts
  - Construction and operation
  - Maintenance
  - Rural homeowner wellhead protection

Well and Septic 101 event sponsored by  
Kalamazoo County

# WELL AND SEPTIC 101

**DATE: 09/19/2018**

**TIME: 6PM**

Registration is from 5:30-6:00

**Location:**

Kalamazoo County Expo Center

Conference Room A

2900 Lake St, Kalamazoo, MI



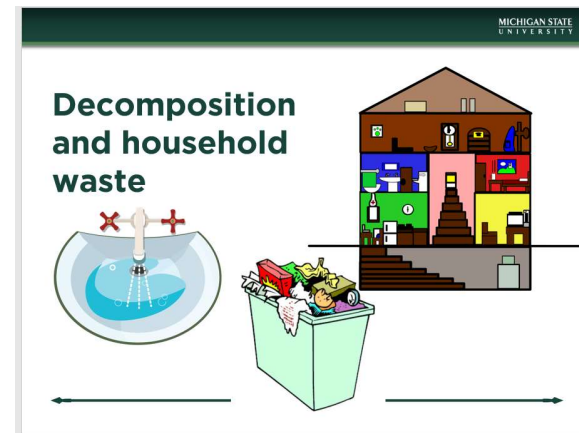
Attention homeowners, realtors.

# First Annual!



## Kinawa Middle School Science Week - Okemos

- Septic System operation to demonstrate decomposition for Middle School Youth
- Presented a brief lesson to the entire Grade 5 school science classes
- Played a quiz game of what they just learned



**Jeopardy**  
**Decomposition**



End







# Association Support

**Dave Cotton:** *Michigan Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association*



# Michigan Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association - MOWRA

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Dave Cotton – President

Ron Lindsay – Vice President

Matt Johnson – Secretary/Treasure

Larry Stephens – Past President

# What is MOWRA

---

- ***A private non-profit organization made up of onsite industry professionals***
- ***An Affiliate of NOWRA the National Onsite Recycling Association***

# Why is There MOWRA

---

## Statement of Purpose

- To bring together all of the Onsite Wastewater Professionals in Michigan (regulatory, academic, research, testing, design, consulting, manufacturing, installation, and servicing) to form an organization for the purpose of promoting and improving onsite waste water treatment disposal and management practices which will be safe, effective, ecologically sound, and economically feasible.



# Why is There MOWRA

---

## **Statement of Purpose (cont)**



□ **To promote the development of more uniform technically based onsite practices and regulations across the state.**



□ **To provide a state wide forum for evaluation of codes and regulations, formulation and revising standards and practices and education the entire onsite wastewater profession.**



# Why is There MOWRA

---

## **Statement of Purpose (cont)**

- 
- **To collect informational resources and provide for meetings, tours, and other methods of information exchange.**
-



# What Has MOWRA Done

---

- We have actively supported the MOWC since our inception.
  - We brought you the Wednesday night buffet
- We were active supporters of the Novi Training Center.
- We have been at the table as a stakeholder in State-Wide Sanitary Code Legislation efforts.
-

## What Has MOWRA Done

---

- ❑ We set up and sponsor field trips to tour active alternative treatment systems. During Septic Smart Week!
- ❑ We were a major contributor to MSU Extension for the development of a homeowner video. Something each of you can share with your homeowner client.

# Out of Sight Not Out of Mind

---

- [https://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,4561,7-135-3313\\_71618\\_51002-468066--,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,4561,7-135-3313_71618_51002-468066--,00.html)

# What is MOWRA Doing

---

- ❑ Developing a Basics of Onsite Wastewater Systems course for onsite professional with plans to provide it in at least 6 locations across Michigan.
- ❑ Remaining active in MOWC.
- ❑ Staying engaged in Legislative action affecting our industry.
- ❑ Being involved with NOWRA and other State Affiliates.

# What can YOU DO?

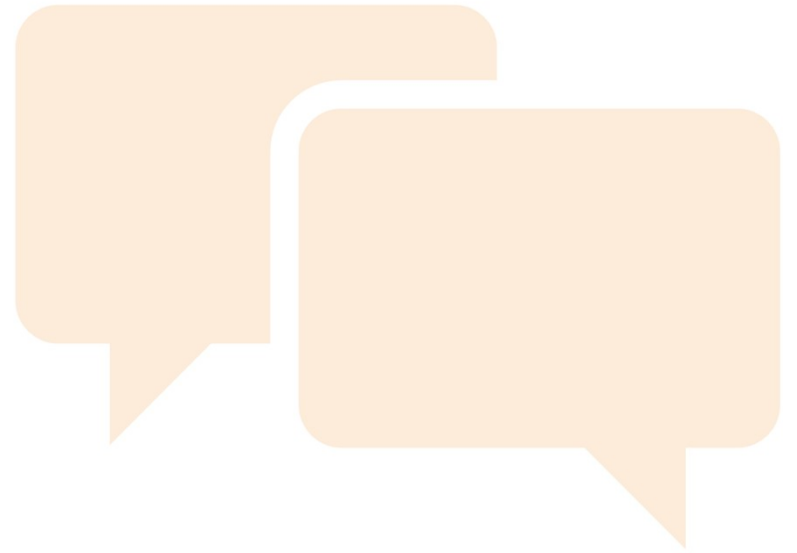
---

- Join MOWRA for \$85 per year.
  - Provides full membership to NOWRA (a \$10 savings)
  - Talk to Matt Johnson, or
  
- Go to the Web site at [MOWRA.org](http://MOWRA.org)





Any Questions  
for our Panel?



Where Do We Go  
From Here?

- Give us your comments!!
  - Fill out the SepticSmart 2019 Questionnaire!!
- Check out our DEQ table here for additional resources.
  - Support SepticSmart week and get your local governments and agencies to proclaim SepticSmart week 2019!!

# Who wants to share?



How did you hear of SepticSmart?



Did you participate in SepticSmart Outreach Activities in 2018?



What printed products would make outreach easier for SepticSmart week?



Do you have any ideas to help promote SepticSmart 2019?



Any topic ideas for a new MDEQ minute video for SepticSmart 2019?

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What are the  
available  
resources?








www.michigan.gov/deqsepticsmart

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying [www.michigan.gov/deqsepticsmart](http://www.michigan.gov/deqsepticsmart). The page features a dark blue header with navigation links: DEQ, Contacts, Permits, Online Services, Programs, Locations, and MI.gov. Below the header is the DEQ logo and a search bar. A secondary navigation bar includes links for ABOUT THE DEQ, AIR, LAND, WASTE, and WATER. A left sidebar lists categories under WATER: Great Lakes, Drinking Water, Lakes & Streams, Wetlands, MiWaters, Permits, Wastewater, Onsite Wastewater, and Surface Water. The main content area shows the breadcrumb path: DEQ / WATER / WASTEWATER / ONSITE WASTEWATER. The page title is "SepticSmart" and the main heading is "Michigan Do Your Part and Get SepticSmart!". A cartoon character in a green uniform and cap is shown holding a sign that says "septicsmart" and "www.epa.gov/septic". Below this, text reads: "The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)- in conjunction with federal, state and local governments, and private sector partners- will kick off its seventh annual SepticSmart Week to encourage American homeowners and communities to properly maintain their septic systems [www.epa.gov/septic](http://www.epa.gov/septic)."







# Social Media Toolkit





SepticSmart in Michigan	
	<p><b>Save the Date: September 17-21, 2018</b></p> <p><a href="http://www.epa.gov/septic/septic-systems-outreach-toolkit">www.epa.gov/septic/septic-systems-outreach-toolkit</a>  <a href="http://www.michigan.gov/deq/septic">www.michigan.gov/deq/septic</a></p>
<p>The U.S. EPA, in conjunction with federal, state and local governments, and private sector partners will kick off its seventh annual <b>SepticSmart</b> Week (September 17-21, 2018) to encourage American homeowners and communities to properly maintain their septic systems. For more information visit: <a href="http://www.epa.gov/septic">www.epa.gov/septic</a></p> <p>Michigan has a vision to protect and promote the wise use of its globally unique water sources. Proper septic system maintenance protects public health, the environment, and saves the homeowner money through avoided costly repairs. <b>SepticSmart</b> Program educates homeowners about proper septic system care and maintenance all year long. In addition, it serves as an online resource for industry practitioners, local governments, and community organizations, providing access to tools to educate clients and residents.</p> <p>For free downloads of these graphics go to <a href="http://www.michigan.gov/deq/septic">www.michigan.gov/deq/septic</a> or email DEQ Onsite Wastewater Staff Dale Ludman: <a href="mailto:dale.ludman@michigan.gov">dale.ludman@michigan.gov</a>          Kristine Rendon: <a href="mailto:kristine@michigan.gov">kristine@michigan.gov</a></p>	
	<p><b>Social Media Toolkit</b></p> <p>Contains material and information your organization can use to advertise and promote <b>SepticSmart</b> Week.</p> <p>You can either copy the messages directly or customize them to reach your audience. Contact DEQ Onsite Wastewater Program for this toolkit.</p>
	<p><b>SepticSmart Postcard</b></p> <p>Reminder to get your tanks pumped. Space available for personal business information.</p>
	<p><b>Do Your Part Get SepticSmart Flyer</b></p> <p>Protect It and Inspect It. Reminding homeowners to have system inspected every three years and tanks pumped every three to five years.</p>
	<p><b>SepticSmart Dos and Don'ts for an Advanced Treatment Unit (ATU)</b></p> <p>Flyer explaining what is an ATU and why would a homeowner need an ATU versus a traditional septic system? Additionally, explains what the required maintenance on an ATU with a list of Do and Don'ts.</p>

SepticSmart in Michigan	
	<p><b>A Homeowner's Guide to Septic Systems</b></p> <p>Download and print an 8-page informational booklet to help a homeowner understand what a Septic System is and the importance of maintaining this system.</p>
	<p><b>New Homebuyer's Guide to Septic Systems</b></p> <p>A double-sided print-out into a four-page brochure for basic information of owning a home with a septic system.</p> <p>Space available for personal business information.</p>
	<p><b>Proper Landscaping On and Around Your Septic System</b></p> <p>A flyer to help educate homeowners on the importance of keeping your septic system out of harm's way. Landscaping do's and don'ts over your <b>septic field</b>.</p>
	<p><b>On a septic system? When is the last time you thought about it?</b></p> <p><b>Door Hanger Brochure</b></p> <p>Can be used to notify homeowners about inspecting their septic tank and the importance of pumping. With five Septic Tips on the back. Comes in door hanger style or a mail insert style.</p>
	<p><b>Top 10 Ways to Be a Good Septic Owner</b></p> <p>Checklist handout to educate homeowners of how to maintain their septic systems by listing the top 10 ways to ensure a healthier system.</p>
	<p><b>'Not in My Septic System! Magnet</b></p> <p>Free magnet to provide to homeowners with an easy reminder on what not to put in their system and when they should schedule their next service. Contact DEQ Onsite Wastewater Program for free magnets.</p>

Visit: [www.michigan.gov/septic](http://www.michigan.gov/septic) or [www.epa.gov/septic](http://www.epa.gov/septic) for more information.

FREE Printable Resources!!

## Did you know?

Common household leaks can add hundreds of extra gallons of water every day, stressing your septic system.



## Don't Strain Your Drain!

Overloading your septic system with water is a leading cause of failure.

Save water and support your septic system's health. For the long-term care of your system, have your septic tank inspected and pumped out by a licensed septic tank contractor as needed (on average every three to five years).

**Know your part, be SepticSmart!**  
Learn more at [www.epa.gov/septicSMART](http://www.epa.gov/septicSMART)

Contact your local Health Department for more information on servicing septic systems in your area.



Your Information Here

EPA-832-E-12-001  
September 2012

DEQ Department of Environmental Quality [www.michigan.gov/deqsepticSMART](http://www.michigan.gov/deqsepticSMART)

# SepticSmart Postcard

## Do Your Part, Be SepticSmart

### The Do's and Don'ts of Your Septic System

Learn these simple steps to protect your home, health, environment and property

#### Protect It and Inspect It:

**Do:**

- Have your system inspected (in general) every three years by a licensed contractor and have the tank pumped, when necessary, generally every three to five years.

#### Think at the Sink:

**Don't:**

- Pour cooking grease or oil down the sink or toilet.
- Rinse coffee grounds into the sink.
- Pour household chemicals down the sink or flush them.

**Do:**

- Eliminate or limit the use of a garbage disposal.
- Properly dispose of coffee grounds & food.
- Put grease in a container to harden before discarding in the trash.

#### Don't Overload the Commode:

**Don't:**

- Flush non-degradable products or chemicals, such as feminine hygiene products, condoms, dental floss, diapers, cigarette butts, cat litter, paper towels, pharmaceuticals.

**Do:**

- Dispose of these items in the trash can!

#### Shield Your Field:

**Don't:**

- Park or drive on your drainfield. The weight can damage the drain lines.
- Plant trees or shrubs too close to your drainfield, roots can grow into your system and clog it.

**Do:**

- Consult a septic service professional to advise you of the proper distance for planting trees and shrubs, depending on your septic tank location.

#### Don't Strain Your Drain:

**Don't:**

- Concentrate your water use by using your dishwasher, shower, washing machine, and toilet at the same time. All that extra water can really strain your septic system.

**Do:**

- Stagger the use of your water-using appliances. This is especially important for pump-out stations.
- Be...



# The Do's and Don'ts of your Septic System

## SepticSmart Dos and Don'ts for an Advanced Treatment Unit (ATU)



septicSMART  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

### What is an ATU?

Advanced Treatment Units (ATUs), referred here to as an individual residential system, are small biological treatment systems used to treat wastewater to a higher degree than a traditional septic system.

### Why would I need or want an ATU versus a traditional septic system?

ATUs are used in many states to achieve a higher-quality wastewater than what exits traditional septic tanks. In fact, they are necessary in some areas — either because of the sensitivity of the environment, or because of site conditions. ATUs are also designed to reduce nutrient loadings, whereas traditional septic systems are not.

### What is the required maintenance?

As with all septic systems, an ATU's proper functioning relies on regular maintenance. Due to its advanced components, an ATU needs more maintenance than a traditional septic system.

To ensure proper functioning, most states require annual operation, maintenance, monitoring and reporting as a requirement of the homeowner's septic permit. A maintenance provider should perform these services. Contact the ATU manufacturer for information on maintenance providers. The ATU manufacturer trains maintenance providers to ensure they are familiar with the manufacturer's treatment system.

In addition to the *Dos and Don'ts of Septic Systems*, ATUs have additional dos and don'ts because of their advanced parts.

### Follow Septic Sam's ATU dos and don'ts

#### Don't:

- Turn off any air supply device, alarm or electrical component of the system.
- Bypass the system.
- Modify, cover or move any system components without prior approval from the service provider.
- Pump the ATU without service provider approval or supervision.

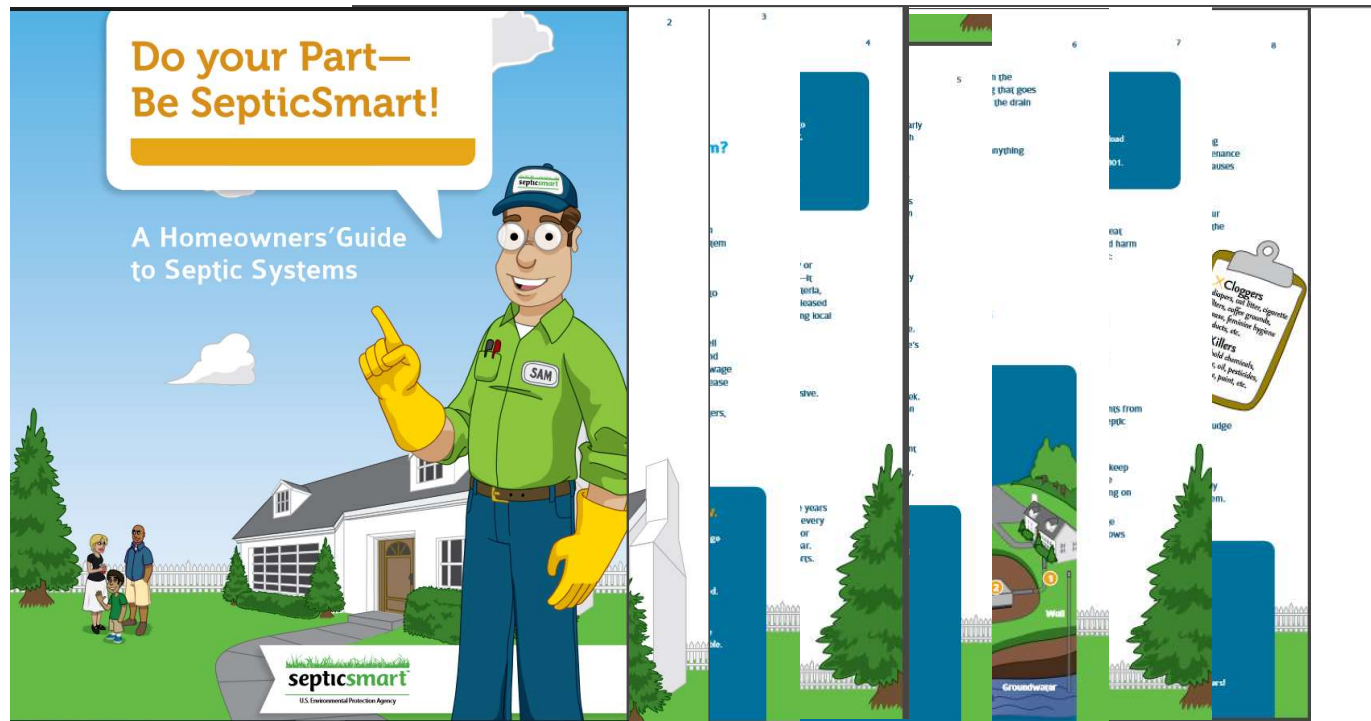
#### Do:

- Use soap
- low-sulfur
- phospho
- Fix
- M

# Do's and Don't for an ATU

For more

# Guide to Septic Systems





# New Homebuyers Guide

## Step 1: Understand your septic system

### Does my new home have a septic system? How do I find it?

You most likely have a septic system if:

- You are on well water;
- The water line coming into your house does not have a meter;
- Your neighbors have a septic system; or
- You live in a rural area.

You can find your septic system by:

- Looking at the "as built" drawing for your home's septic system, which you can request from your local (e.g., town, county, or state) health department's records;
- Checking your yard for inspection caps, lids, or manhole covers;
- Working with a septic system service provider, who can help locate the system; and,
- Asking the seller or realtor.

### How does a septic system work?

1. All water runs out of your house from one main drainage pipe into a septic tank.
2. The septic tank is a buried, watertight container. Its job is to hold the wastewater long enough for solids to settle to the bottom (sludge) while the fats, oil and grease float to the top (scum).
3. For conventional septic systems, liquid wastewater exits the tank and is spread evenly throughout the drainfield, usually through a distribution box. Systems with more advanced treatment may have an additional component between the septic tank and drainfield.



4. Once in the drainfield, the wastewater percolates into the soil, which reclaims the water for future reuse by naturally removing harmful bacteria, viruses, and some nutrients.

This process may vary based on the site conditions of your property (e.g., soil type, proximity to water). A septic system service provider and your septic system's "as built" drawings will be able to tell you what type of system is on the property.

## Step 2: Get your system inspected

### How can I be sure that my septic system is working correctly?

Buying a home is one of the biggest investments you will make, so you want to avoid any surprises after you purchase the home. Just like your furnace, the septic system is expensive to repair or replace so you want it to be in good condition when you buy the home. Have the system inspected by a septic system service provider before you purchase a home. Inspections may be required by your local or state government or by your mortgage lender. Inspection results can help you decide if the home is right for you.

### What should happen during a septic system inspection?

The inspector will check for the following:

- Pumping and maintenance records;
- The age of the septic system;
- Sludge levels and scum thickness in the tank;
- Signs of leakage, such as low water levels in the tank;
- Signs of backup, such as standing in the tank above the outlet pipe;
- Integrity of the tank, inlet, and outlet pipes;
- The drainfield, for signs of system failure like standing water;
- The distribution box, to make sure drain lines are receiving equal flow; and
- Available records, to ensure the system complies with local regulations regarding function and location.

## Step 3: Everyday Maintenance

### What can I do to help maintain my system every day?

The average lifespan of a septic system is 15 to 40 years, but it can last longer if properly maintained!

- Think of the sink. Consider what you put into your toilet and sink and the impact it may have on your system. Many common household items can enter clog your system or kill the microbes that treat the wastewater.
  - "Cloggers" include diapers, baby wipes, cat litter, cigarettes, coffee grounds, grease, and feminine hygiene products.
  - "Killers" include household chemicals, gasoline, oil, pesticides, antifreeze, paint, and high amounts of anti-bacterial soaps and detergents.
- Don't strain your drain.
  - The less water you use, the less your septic system has to work. Stagger the use of

appliances, use high efficiency plumbing fixtures, and repair any leaks in your home.

- For more information, go to <https://www.epa.gov/watersense/>
- Shield your field.
  - Keep your car and anything heavier than your lawnmower off your drainfield.
  - Eliminate or limit the use of a garbage disposal. This will significantly reduce the amount of fats, grease, and solids that enter your septic system and could clog your drainfield.
  - Plant trees away from the drainfield since tree roots can clog the field and cause the system to fail.
  - Keep excess water from irrigation, significant rainfall, or drains off the drainfield.

## Step 4: Preventive Maintenance

### What else can I do to help maintain my system?

A typical septic system should be inspected every three to five years by a septic system service provider. The tank should be pumped as recommended by the service provider or as required by your town, county, or state. Generally, you can plan to have the tank pumped approximately every three to five years. Just like changing the oil in your car, preventive septic system maintenance will extend the life of your system for a small cost compared to the cost of replacing the system.

### What are the costs associated with the maintenance of a septic system?

Your home's septic system should be inspected every three to five years as part of its routine maintenance and pumped as necessary depending on the results of the inspection. The maintenance service typically costs between \$250 to \$500, based on nationwide industry estimates. Maintenance costs are much more affordable compared to the expense of repairing or replacing a septic system which can cost thousands to tens of thousands of dollars. Contact a local septic system service provider who can provide a cost estimate specific to your area and needs. They can also provide you with more accurate information on how frequently to service and pump out your system.

## Step 5: Corrective Maintenance

### How do I know if my septic system is not working properly? What do I do?

There are a few signs of a septic system malfunction. If you discover any of these warning signs, call a septic system service provider immediately. One call could save you thousands of dollars!

- Wastewater backing up or gurgling into household drains.
- A strong odor around the septic tank or drainfield.
- Bright green, spongy grass appearing on the drainfield.

With proper care and maintenance, your septic system will serve your home for years to come. That's why it's important for you to do your part and be SepticSmart!

## New Homebuyer's Guide to Septic Systems

If you are about to purchase a new home with a septic system, this homebuyer guide is for you!

This guide provides information homebuyers need to know before purchasing a home with a septic system (also known as an onsite wastewater system), how a septic system works, and the importance of having it inspected prior to purchasing a home. In addition, this guide provides information on everyday, preventative, and corrective maintenance for when you are living in your new home.

For additional information, contact your local health department, real estate agent or visit [www.epa.gov/septic](http://www.epa.gov/septic).



# Proper Landscaping

## Proper Landscaping On and Around Your Septic System

The drainfield is a vital part of your septic system. Having the right landscaping on and around your system is important, as tree and shrubbery roots can grow into the drain lines. Also, other heavy items like cars and livestock can break drain lines. Strong roots and heavy items can cause the drainfield to fail. And if the drainfield fails, your system fails.



### Here are some tips to keep your drainfield out of harm's way.

Locate your septic tank and drainfield. Then make sure the area is clear of:

- Underground sprinkler lines
- Decks and patios
- Sports courts
- Storage sheds
- Swing sets
- Sand boxes
- Driveways
- Vehicles
- Swimming pools



Plant native, drought-tolerant plants. These are some of the best for your septic system and its drainfield:

#### Grass:

- Fescue
- Lawn
- Ornamental grasses
- Wildflower meadow mixes

#### Groundcovers for sun:

- Buglewood (Ajuga)
- Carpet heathers (Calluna Vulgaris)
- Cotoneaster (Cotoneaster)
- Ground ivy (Glechoma)
- Kinnikinnick (Arctostaphylos)
- Periwinkle (Vinca)

#### Groundcovers for shade:

- Bunchberry (Cornus)
- Chameleon (Houttuynia)
- Ferns
- Mosses
- Sweet woodruff (Galium Odoratium)
- Wild ginger (Asarum)
- Wintergreen (Gaultheria)

### Follow Septic Sam's landscaping do's and don'ts:

#### Don't:

- Plant a vegetable garden on or near the drainfield.
- Put plastic sheets, bark, gravel or other fill over the drainfield.
- Reshape or fill the ground surface over the drainfield and reserve area. However, just adding topsoil is generally OK if it isn't more than a couple of inches.
- Make ponds on or near the septic system and the reserve area.

#### Do:

- Plant grass or keep existing native vegetation. These are the best covers for your drainfield.
- Direct all surface drainage away from the septic system.
- Use shallow-rooted plants (see plant list above). Tree and shrub roots can grow into the drainlines, clogging and breaking them.
- Avoid water-loving plants and trees.
- Make sure the tank lid is secure.

For more SepticSmart tips, visit [www.epa.gov/septicmart](http://www.epa.gov/septicmart)



# Door Hanger



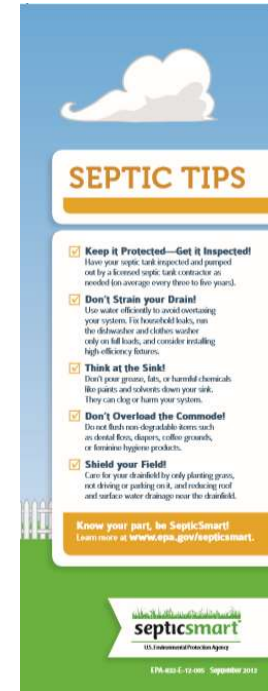
**On a septic system?**  
**When's the last time you thought about it?**

Your septic system is part of your home and your responsibility.

Don't wait until you have issues with your septic system. Protect your home investment and avoid costly replacement—call a licensed septic tank contractor today.

- Have your septic tank inspected and pumped out by a licensed septic tank contractor as needed (on average every three to five years).
- Protect your system by practicing simple, daily tips (see reverse).

**septicSMART**  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



**SEPTIC TIPS**

- ✓ **Keep it Protected—Get it Inspected!**  
Have your septic tank inspected and pumped out by a licensed septic tank contractor as needed (on average every three to five years).
- ✓ **Don't Strain your Drain!**  
Use water efficiently to avoid overloading your system. Fix household leaks, run the dishwasher and clothes washer only on full loads, and consider installing high-efficiency fixtures.
- ✓ **Think at the Sink!**  
Don't pour grease, fat, or harmful chemicals like paints and solvents down your sink. They can clog or harm your system.
- ✓ **Don't Overload the Commo!**  
Don't flush non-degradable items such as dental floss, diapers, coffee grounds, or feminine hygiene products.
- ✓ **Shield your Field!**  
Care for your drainfield by only planting grass, not driving or parking on it, and reducing roof and surface water drainage near the drainfield.

Know your part. Be SepticSmart!  
Learn more at [www.epa.gov/septicmart](http://www.epa.gov/septicmart).

**septicSMART**  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

EPH-603-E-12-006 September 2012

## Why is it important to properly maintain my septic tank?

### It saves you money.

Malfunctioning systems can cost \$3,000-\$7,000 to repair or replace compared to maintenance costs of about \$250-\$500 every three to five years.

### It protects the value of your home.

Malfunctioning septic systems can drastically reduce property values, hamper the sale of your home, and even pose a legal liability.

### It keeps your water clean and safe.

A properly maintained system helps keep your family's drinking water pure, and reduces the risk of contaminating community, local, and regional waters.

### It keeps the environment clean.

Malfunctioning septic systems can harm the local ecosystem by killing native plants, fish, and shellfish.

## Do I have a septic system? If so, how can I find it?

### Here are a few tips to determine if you have a septic system and how to locate it.

#### You most likely have a system if:

- You are on well water.
- The water line coming into your house does not have a meter.
- Your neighbors have a septic system.

#### You can find your septic system by:

- Looking on the "as built" drawing for your home.
- Checking in your yard for lids or manhole covers.
- Using an inspector/pumper, who can also help you find exactly where the system is located.

## What can I do to help maintain my system?

### Protect it and inspect it.

A typical septic system should be inspected at least every three years by a licensed contractor and your tank pumped as recommended by the inspector (generally every three to five years).

### Think at the Sink.

- Your septic system contains a living collection of organisms that digest and treat waste. Pouring toxins down your drain can kill these organisms and harm your septic system.
- Oil-based paints, solvents, and large volumes of toxic cleaners should not enter your septic system. Even latex paint cleanup waste should be minimized.
- Eliminating the use of a garbage disposal can reduce the amount of fats, grease, and solids entering the septic tank and ultimately clogging the drainfield. Increased disposal use results in more frequent pumping.

### Don't Overload the Commode.

A variety of household products can clog and potentially damage septic system components.

#### Do not flush:

- Feminine hygiene products
- Condoms
- Diapers
- Cigarette butts
- Coffee grounds
- Cat litter

For a complete list, visit [www.epa.gov/septicmart](http://www.epa.gov/septicmart).

### Don't Stop

It's simple. Here are a few things you can do to help maintain your septic system:

- Run drains regularly.
- Repair leaks.
- Use high-quality, biodegradable cleaning products.

### Shield your

It's equally important to protect your septic system from damage. Here are some things to avoid:

- Do not use harsh chemicals.
- Plant trees and shrubs near the tank and drainfield.
- Keep drains clear of debris.
- Avoid heavy loads on the drainfield.

### Mind the

Here are some things to watch for:

- Wastewater backing up in toilets or sinks.
- A strong, unpleasant odor around the tank or drainfield.
- Bright green grass or other vegetation growing in the drainfield area.

## How does a septic tank work?

### Overview of how a septic tank works.

Wastewater from your house flows into a septic tank.

The tank is a buried, water-tight container made of concrete, fiberglass or polyethylene. Wastewater long enough to settle down to the bottom (forming sludge) and grease floats to the top (as scum) and a T-shaped outlet prevent wastewater from leaving the tank and entering the drainfield area.

Wastewater then exits the tank into the drainfield. If the drainfield is overloaded with too much wastewater, causing sewage to flow to the surface, it can cause backups in toilets and sinks.

Wastewater percolates into the ground, where it is broken down by naturally occurring bacteria.



## SepticSmart Helps Protect Your Home and Family

If you have a septic system, it's extremely important to keep up with its proper care and maintenance. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's SepticSmart initiative helps ensure that we all know how to do our part to safeguard our community's health and protect the environment. It can also protect your family and keep you from spending thousands of dollars repairing or replacing a damaged system.



For more information on how you can be SepticSmart, please visit: [www.epa.gov/septicmart](http://www.epa.gov/septicmart)

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## Do you have a septic system? Be SepticSmart!

A simple checklist can help you determine if you have a septic system and how to locate it.



# Brochure

# Top 10 Ways...

## Top 10 Ways to Be a Good Septic Owner

- ✓ Have your system inspected every three years by a qualified professional or according to your state/local health department's recommendations
- ✓ Have your septic tank pumped, when necessary, generally every three to five years
- ✓ Avoid pouring harsh products (e.g., oils, grease, chemicals, paint, medications) down the drain
- ✓ Discard non-degradable products in the trash (e.g., floss, disposable wipes, cat litter) instead of flushing them
- ✓ Keep cars and heavy vehicles parked away from the drainfield and tank
- ✓ Follow the system manufacturer's directions when using septic tank cleaners and additives
- ✓ Repair leaks and use water efficient fixtures to avoid overloading the system
- ✓ Maintain plants and vegetation near the system to ensure roots do not block drains
- ✓ Use soaps and detergents that are low-suds, biodegradable, and low- or phosphate-free
- ✓ Prevent system freezing during cold weather by inspecting and insulating vulnerable system parts (e.g., the inspection pipe and soil treatment area)

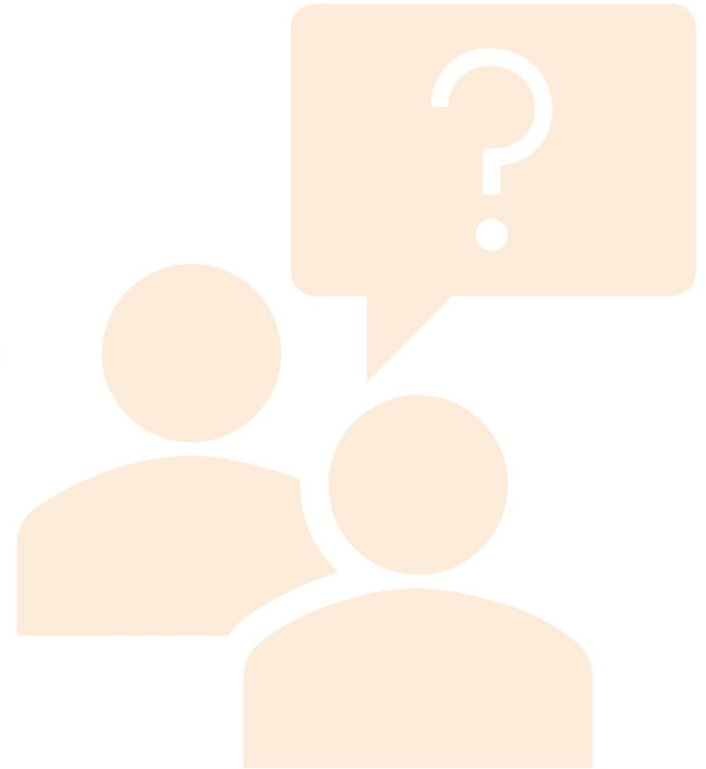


For more SepticSmart tips, visit [www.epa.gov/septicSMART](http://www.epa.gov/septicSMART)

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Any Questions?



# Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

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