

MONITORING PROGRAM NEWS 2005

New Systems Monitoring Program Supervisor: Wiles Edison

Joe Hile, who managed the non-standard monitoring program for many years, retired in July of 2004. Wiles Edison, who has worked as a district specialist in the Well & Septic Division for the past 8 ½ years, has taken his place. Prior to his time in Well & Septic, Wiles spent four years permitting and inspecting food facilities in Sonoma, Marin and Los Angeles Counties as well as four years permitting and inspecting solid waste facilities here in Sonoma County. Wiles looks forward to working with you and is available to answer any questions you might have regarding the monitoring program. He can be reached at (707) 565-1691.

Prevention of Septic System Failure

by Rebecca Ng, R.E.H.S., Well & Septic Division Supervisor

Septic systems must be maintained for effective results and longevity. This is especially true for the more complicated non-standard systems that usually include pump systems and other working parts. For good maintenance:

- The septic tank typically should be pumped once every 3 - 5 years.
- If the septic tank has an effluent filter, it must be cleaned at least once a year.
- For non-standard systems, the disposal lines should be purged 1 - 2 times a year.
- If there is a dual disposal field, the diversion valve should be switched every six months.
- If there are shrubs and/or trees close to the septic system, roots can invade the disposal fields. Contain or trim the roots and branches away from the septic system.
- Do not allow surface water to pond around the septic tank or sump and in disposal fields.

The following items should be kept out of the septic system. They increase the amount of solids in the septic tank which eventually leads to clogging in the disposal lines.

- Inert Materials: Plastic; rubber; scouring pads, dental floss; kitty litter; cigarette filters; bandages; hair; mop strings; lint; rags; cloth and towels.
- Paper Products: Disposable diapers; paper towels; facial tissues; baby wipes; lotioned, scented or quilted toilet tissue; and moist toilet tissue. They do not dissolve readily in a septic system.
- Food Wastes: Animal fats and bones; grease; coffee grounds; citrus and melon rinds; corn cobs; and egg shells. Spoiled dairy products and yeasts may cause excessive microbe growth that interferes with wastewater degradation.
- Household Products: Female sanitary products; cotton balls or swabs; or condoms. Antimicrobial soaps and automatic disinfection tablets may kill the bacteria in the system.

The following items may harm or kill the bacteria in the septic system needed for wastewater degradation.

- Medications/Ailments: Normal use of over the counter medications will not affect the septic system. However, do not flush expired medicines or antibiotics into the system. Some prescription medications and oral or intravenous chemotherapy are known to cause disruption to the system.
- Commercial Additives: There is no evidence to support the use of additives with a normal functioning septic system. Some additives may do more harm than good.
- Chemicals and Toxins: Paint; paint thinner; solvents; volatile substances; drain cleaners; automotive fluids; fuels; pesticides; herbicides; fertilizers; metals; disinfectants, sanitizers; bleach mop water; floor stripping wastes; excessive use of household chemicals.
- Laundry Practices: Laundry should be spread out over the week so the water entering the system is spread out. Liquid detergents are recommended over powders and fabric softener sheets are recommended over liquid softeners. Excessive use of detergents, especially those containing bleach can disrupt the system. Bleach should be used sparingly and at half the rate indicated on the container.

Additional information on water reduction, septic system maintenance, purging the septic system, and plant selection for septic systems can be found at the PRMD Well and Septic Cubicle.