

# CUYAHOGA COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

YOUR TRUSTED SOURCE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATION

## Household Sewage Treatment System (STS) Maintenance

Although it may be buried underground and easily forgotten, your household sewage system performs a vital task. It is responsible for receiving, treating, and disposing of all the household wastewater you generate each and every day – every washer load, shower, and flush. But just like a furnace or roof, it should not be taken for granted and will not last forever.

### Cleaning the Septic Tank

Having your septic tank(s) pumped on a routine basis is also an essential part of maintaining your system in good working order. Materials like sludge and grease will accumulate in the septic tank and must be removed regularly before they impact your filter bed, leach field, evapo-transpiration field, or aeration system.



Your septic tank(s) should be pumped out at least once every three years. If your family consists of four or more people or you utilize a garbage disposal, you probably need to have your tank pumped more often.

Even though sewage systems thrive on wastewater, certain chemicals can harm the delicate balance in a septic tank and should not be run through the system. Other materials may cause a blockage or clog pipes.

### Some things to avoid:

- Chlorine bleach
- Drain cleaners
- Floor wax
- Kerosene and gasoline
- Motor oil
- Nail polish remover
- Paints and solvents
- Thinners
- Animal fat
- Cigarettes
- Coffee grounds
- Condoms
- Cotton balls and cotton swabs
- Grease and cooking oil
- Plastics
- Tampons

### Service Contracts

Many STSs have parts that need to be serviced regularly, outside of the normal pumping every three years. **For these systems, it is necessary to secure a service contract with a licensed Service Provider.**



5550 Venture Drive ♦ Parma, Ohio 44130

Direct: 216-201-2000 ♦ Fax: 216-676-1311 ♦ TTY: 216-676-1313 ♦ [www.ccbh.net](http://www.ccbh.net)

Terrence M. Allan, R.S., M.P.H. Health Commissioner

### **Warning Signs of a Problem**

Warning signs of an ailing sewage system can be either very subtle or quite obvious. A strong sewage odor may be noticeable in your drains or out in the yard. The grass around the system may stay unusually wet and spongy. Gray or black sewage may even be evident on the surface of the ground causing an obvious public health concern.

Partially blocked pipes may cause toilets, showers, and sinks to drain sluggishly. A pipe which is completely blocked, damaged, or even collapsed will result in a back-up in the kitchen, bathroom, or basement and may possibly even cause extensive damage to the home.



Systems designed to discharge may not exhibit obvious signs of failure. If they discharge to an underground collector pipe or storm sewer, the improperly treated sewage and resulting odors may not be noticeable to the homeowner.

This unfortunately helps support the “out of sight – out of mind” mentality that many homeowners have pertaining to their household sewage systems. The poor quality of effluent leaving the sewage system flows from the storm sewer or roadside ditch, to a stream or river, and out to Lake Erie.

Some sewage systems discharge to the surface of the ground, to swales, or to roadside ditches. The discharge area should be observed regularly for signs of system failure. Solids and strong sewage odor are obvious signs of a system failure.

### **Protecting Your Investment**

**Do not** build anything over or within ten feet of any part of your sewage system. This includes driveways, fences, swimming pools, sheds, decks, and house additions.

**Do not** allow anyone to drive heavy vehicles like cars or trucks over any portion of the sewage system. Pipes and tanks may be damaged or crushed. The soil in the filtration area may be compacted, which could minimize its ability to filter and absorb sewage.

**Do not** plant any trees or shrubs with complex root systems, like willows or soft maples, near any portion of the system. Their roots will grow quickly and travel significant distances laterally underground. As they seek water, they will grow into pipes causing blockages.



### **If you have any questions?**

Please visit our webpage at <https://www.ccbh.net/sewage-system-maintenance/> or contact a sanitarian in the Environmental Public Health Service Area by calling the Cuyahoga County Board of Health office at (216) 201-2020 and selecting option #3.

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