

In areas where a public sewer system is not available, septic systems provide the functions of both sewer and treatment plants. The proper operation of your septic system is essential to health, property value and the environment.

When it comes to septic tank care, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” A small commitment to the care of your septic system will help protect your system from failing.

Individual Sewage Disposal Systems

The individual sewage disposal system (ISDS) is a small, on-site treatment and disposal system buried in the ground. The ISDS is composed of a septic tank and a soil absorption area.

The Septic Tank

The septic tank is a watertight box usually made of pre-cast concrete, plastic or reinforced fiberglass. When household waste enters this box, several things occur:

- Organic solid material floats to the surface and forms a layer of what is commonly called “scum.” Bacteria in the septic tank biologically convert this material to liquid.
- Inorganic or inert solid materials and by-products of bacterial digestion sink to the bottom of the tank and form a layer commonly called “sludge.”
- Only fairly clear water should exist between the scum and the sludge layers. Only this clear water should overflow into the soil absorption area.

The Soil Absorption (or Leaching) Area

There are three types of soil absorption systems: fields, trenches and pits.

Fields and trenches use perforated pipe to carry the clear liquid from the septic tank to a designated area where the liquid can be either absorbed into the soil or into the atmosphere. Fields may also use chambers. A pit is lined with unmortared blocks and the clear liquid is absorbed into the soil.

Ensuring the Effectiveness of an ISDS

The following guidelines help to ensure an effective and reliable septic system.

Dos and Don'ts Inside the House

DO use trash cans to dispose of items that can cause maintenance problems and/or increase the need for septic pumping, such as:

- Egg shells, cantaloupe seeds, celery, gum, coffee grounds, tea bags, yeast, chewing tobacco, cigarette butts
- Paper towels, newspapers, sanitary napkins, diapers, cat litter, candy wrappers and large amounts of hair

DO collect grease in a container and dispose with your trash. Avoid excessive use of garbage disposals because food by-products accelerate the need for septic pumping and increased maintenance.

DO choose a laundry detergent that does not contain phosphates.

DO use substitutes for household hazardous waste. Instead of using ammonia-based cleaners, try sprinkling baking soda on a damp sponge. For windows, use a solution of 2 tablespoons white vinegar to 1 quart water. Place the mixture into a spray bottle.

DON'T use special additives deemed to enhance your system's performance. Additives can damage your leach field and other areas in the ISDS.

DON'T flush:

- Medicines, such as pills, capsules or tablets
- Excessive amounts of bath and body oils, flammable toxic products or water softener backwash (however, potassium chloride water softeners are safe to use)
- Household cleaners, especially floor wax and carpet cleaners, chloride

bleach, chlorides and pool/spa products. (A good rule of thumb is any substance that irritates your skin will damage the septic system.)

- Pesticides, herbicides, agricultural chemicals or fertilizers

DON'T ignore leaky plumbing fixtures – repair them. A leaky toilet can waste up to 2,000 gallons of water a day. That's 10-20 times more than a household's typical daily usage. Leaky fixtures increase your water bill, waste natural resources and overload your system.

Dos and Don'ts Outside the House

DON'T dig without knowing the location of your ISDS. Try to plan landscaping and permanent outdoor structures before installation. **Plant trees at least 10 feet from the septic system.**

DON'T drive over your tank or any buried components of your system.



Individual sewage disposal systems with tree and driveway over the absorption field area.

DON'T pump RV waste into your ISDS. Not only is it illegal (Nevada Revised Statutes 444.630), but it also increases the frequency of required pumping. It clogs

Warning Signs of ISDS Failure

- Sluggish drainage in the home
- Plumbing backups
- Unusual gurgling sound in pipes and drains
- Outdoor odor and mushy ground

or fouls equipment, resulting in undue maintenance and repair costs.

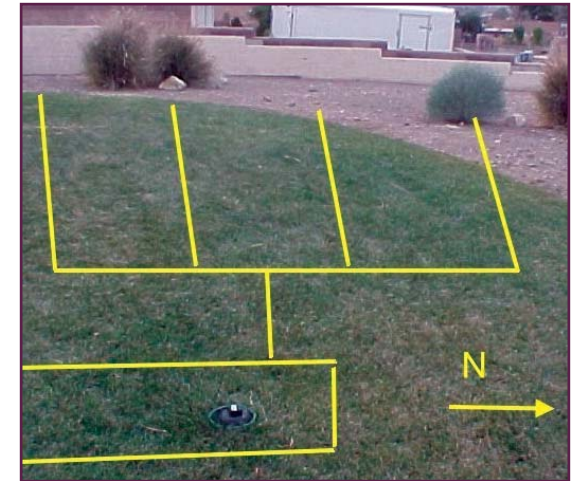
DON'T connect rain gutters or storm drains to the sewer or allow surface water to drain in it. The additional water increases costs, reduces the capacity of collection and treatments systems, and floods the leach field. It can also wash excess solids through the tank.

DON'T dispose water from a swimming pool or hot tub into or over the septic system.

DON'T enter your septic tank. Any work to the tank should be done from the outside by the manufacturer. Gases can be generated in the tank and oxygen depletion can be fatal. The health district recommends that the septic tank be pumped every 4-5 years.



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Preventive Maintenance for Individual Sewage Disposal Systems

SOUTHERN NEVADA HEALTH DISTRICT