

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

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It's Septic Smart Week. Time to "Get Pumped, New Hampshire!"

Many homes in the New England region have septic systems; in fact, New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) estimates that 60% of homes in New Hampshire are served by individual septic systems. It's easy for most homeowners to pay little attention to their septic systems, after all, they are buried underground - out of sight, out of mind. When we flush our toilets, run our clothes washer, dish washer, shower or sink faucets, the wastewater goes away, never to be seen again. Of course, it's not as simple as that; the wastewater doesn't go away – it goes into your septic tank, eventually your leach field, and then into the groundwater and streams and lakes.

When septic systems are correctly designed and functioning, the wastewater is processed through a leach field properly, making it safe for human health and the environment. The built-up solids in the tank need to be removed on a scheduled basis to ensure the wastewater discharged to the leach field is as clean as possible. Inspecting and maintaining your septic system will extend its life, protect your family's health, and save you money. While it's important to understand what you can do in your home to protect your system— such as water conservation measures and knowing what's flushable – making sure you get your septic tank pumped regularly is also critically important.

It is recommended that you get your septic tank pumped every 3 to 5 years, though it depends mostly on how many bathrooms and how many people live in the home. A typical pumpout can cost between \$250 and \$500, which is a far cry from the \$6,000 to \$15,000 it could cost to replace your leach field if your septic system fails. Additionally, it could cost you extra when selling your home, since septic systems are inspected during every real estate transaction in New Hampshire.

When you make the call to get your septic pumped, make sure to contact a NHDES-licensed septage hauler. NHDES provides a [list of licensed haulers](#) on its website. You can also contact [septage haulers on this list participating in a limited time \\$10 rebate](#) being offered to New Hampshire residents by the [New Hampshire Association of Septage Haulers](#).

In between pumpouts, there are things you can do to within your home to protect your septic system as well:

- Don't flush anything but the three P's: pee, poop and paper. Learn more about [what's flushable](#) and what isn't. Many products that claim to be "flushable" actually clog up your system.

- Conserve water. [Small water leaks could be big problems!](#) Fix leaky faucets and toilets ASAP to extend the life of your systems, saving you even more money.
- Only wash clothes when you have full loads. Be mindful of large water uses, and stagger the use of water-generating appliances, such as washing machines, showers and dishwashers.
- Eliminate or limit the use of a garbage disposal system. Wastes from disposals fill up your systems more rapidly, which means more frequent pumping.

The [Get Pumped! New Hampshire website](#) includes many more tips on the “do’s and don’ts” for homeowners with septic systems, such as:

- Don’t pour cooking grease or oil down the sink or toilet.
- Don’t park or drive on your drainage field. The weight can damage drain lines.
- Do eliminate or limit the use of a garbage disposal system.

A healthy balance of protecting your septic system at the drain and pumping it out regularly will not only protect you, your family and your community from contamination, but it will protect your property and your pocketbook.

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