



Septic System Information

The world has seen a major change in the way people deal with their environment in the last 30 years. Environmental problems are often a reflection of our individual practices. In our corner of the world, we are coming to realize that our actions often have unforeseen effects upon the quality of our life and health. Water is the resource that truly is the lifeblood of our local economy in Central Kansas. Most of our economic production is related to water. We irrigate, water cattle, return water back to the earth when we pump oil, and many of our industrial plants use water in their production process.

Without the abundant rainfall that Eastern Kansas receives, we have had to look underground. We are, fortunately, very good at getting groundwater out of the earth and applying it to the task at hand. Unfortunately, in some areas of Kansas we are removing it faster than it naturally replenishes itself. In other ways, we are often lowering the quality of the water through practices that can cause contamination, salinization, or other undesirable effects. To this end, the citizens of Kansas have taken measures to examine what can be done to bring a balance to the relationship between our economic livelihood and the protection of this valuable resource. You, through your elected officials, have established several organizations to both study water problems and to establish practices that will serve to conserve the quality and quantity of this important resource.

There are several organizations that manage the quantity of water that is removed from the ground. The advantage to working at the local level is that solutions can be found that are ideal for the problem at hand, instead of a blanket approach that may not be ideal for everyone.

The cornerstone of Ford County Planning, Zoning, and Environmental Health's approach is the County Sanitary Code. The Code is designed and adopted by County Government to fit the needs of its situation. It also allows each County to determine its areas of concern and the appropriate level or regulation to address these issues. Through the County Code, standards of construction, placement, and operation are established for items that affect groundwater quality.

Water wells and septic systems are the primary exchange points of groundwater on rural properties. When properly constructed and maintained these devices can ensure the groundwater at that homestead remains safe. Ford County Planning, Zoning, and Environmental Health's mission is helping rural residents with these issues by servicing the County Code and providing technical assistance wherever possible. As an extension of your County Government, we strive to help each resident find the best solution to their individual groundwater situation.

Thinking About Installing Your Own System?

It is legal to construct a septic system yourself. If you have access to the heavy equipment, such as a trencher or backhoe, it can be a worthwhile and cost cutting experience. However, it is recommended that you compare the price between performing the installation yourself and price offered by several of the many experienced local contractors. Two days laboring in the hot sun may not be worth the difference in cost to you.

A three (3) feet wide backhoe bucket is invaluable if you are installing chambers or 36" wide pipe and rock laterals. Please DO NOT attempt to install chambers without one. The variability in trench width that comes from digging a 36" wide trench with two feet bucket may cause premature failure of your lines. An experienced backhoe operator can really make a difference in the quality of your system.

We at Ford County Planning, Zoning, and Environmental Health have helped many do-it-yourselfers install systems. We realize that you may have questions, and may require a couple of site visits before and during construction. If you feel you are capable of doing the work, you probably are. We have a video we would be glad to loan you on the installation of chamber systems.

Maintenance of Septic Systems

Operation and maintenance of a septic tank are important. A system that is neglected or misused will have a shortened use expectancy. Lateral fields must be maintained properly to operate at peak efficiency. When failure occurs, immediate repairs are essential to eliminate potential health hazards, costly repairs, and the contamination of your groundwater.

Never enter a septic tank. Toxic gasses in the tank can cause death or injury. Never smoke or use an open flame near a septic tank opening. Combustible gasses such as methane may be present. Treat all contact with septic system components as if they were a biological hazard. Wash thoroughly with a water-bleach mixture after each contact.

Our best advice is simply; Pump Your Tank Regularly!

The average three (3) bedroom house with four occupants should have its tank pumped once every three (3) years.

Septic tank pumping is important because it removes solids from the tank that may build up over time to the point where system failure occurs. When the tank is pumped out it should be done through the manhole, and not access riser. By using the manhole the operator will be able remove the solids by moving the hose around. If the hose is just shoved down a 6" rider the majority of the solids and scum layer will still be present. You are not paying to remove liquid. The lateral field does that for free. You are paying to remove solids. After pumping, you do not need to add a starter. The tank walls are covered with bacteria.

When the tank is being pumped it is a good time to inspect the baffles. These are important because they keep solids under control and out of the lateral lines.

Additives, feeders, cleaners, and starters are not necessary for a well-designed system. If you feel you must use one of these products, investigate it thoroughly before purchase. Many systems have failed soon after an additive was used.

Do not drive over a lateral field. Compaction from vehicles, whether automobiles or other equipment, will cause settling, shifting, or breakage of lateral lines. This can lead to septage surfacing and the creation of a health hazard.

Never plant a vegetable garden over a lateral field. Microbes from the effluent may travel through the soil and contaminate the crop, especially root crops. Do not allow trees to grow over or near the system. Roots from the trees can cause damage to lines as well as plug them. Keep a perennial grass cover over the lateral field to aid in evaporation. Grass which is mowed regularly develops more plants per square feet and draws more water from the lateral field.

Never place a system in a corral or build one over your system. Soil compaction of the site can lessen the systems efficiency by 50% and can result in broken components.

Be conscious of your water usage. Too much water will overload even the best systems. Repair leaky faucets. Take showers instead of baths. Install low volume nozzles in the shower and kitchen.

Do not use large volumes of harsh cleaning chemicals. Most systems will handle the average load of these chemicals without a problem. Larger doses, however, may destroy the beneficial bacteria in your tank, and lateral lines.

Try to do laundry throughout the week, instead of all in one day. This lessens the possibility of surge loads lifting solids into the laterals.

Do not use liquid drain cleaners. A one-ounce dose can kill all of the bacteria in a 1000 gallon tank.

Do not flush non-biodegradable items down the stool. These just act to plug laterals.

Use low phosphorus laundry detergent. Liquid detergent is a better choice than powders.

Do not wash out paint brushes in the sink.

Be cautious if any family member is using antibiotics. These can pass through their system and have the same effect on the septic system as they do in the body.

Recharge water softeners as infrequently as possible.

At the first sign of trouble give Ford County Planning, Zoning, and Environmental Health a call. We may be able to help you diagnose the problem.

Living With a Water Well and a Septic System

Drinking water from a well on your own property is the solution many rural residents have decided upon. Other solutions such as bottled water, rural water districts, and hauling water may not be available or are cost prohibitive. The rural water well is the most common solution. Rural water wells are unlike city water systems in that the city system provides water that is regularly tested for many contaminants on a regular schedule.

This scrutiny of the supply is required under the Safe Drinking Water Act passed by Congress in 1974. This Act has been amended several times to keep up with the changes in health science.

The EPA is required to make sure these standards are met by public water supplies. The homeowner is under no obligation to meet the standards of the Safe Drinking Water Act if their water is for consumption by the residents of a single household. Thus, the rural family may unknowingly consume water that could be hazardous.

Water testing can identify a variety of contaminants that may cause different health concerns. A solution to this problem is a program of water testing for the individual family. The costs of such a program is very reasonable. In fact, water testing can more than pay for itself in reduced costs that are associated with water-borne illnesses derived from contaminated water.

Understanding Your Water Test Report

You should think about the possible health effects of chemicals you plan on using or storing near you well. The more shallow the well, or less modern its construction, the more likely those chemicals may eventually end up in your drinking water. Caution is the best approach when dealing with water wells. It is easier to prevent contamination than it is to remove it.

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