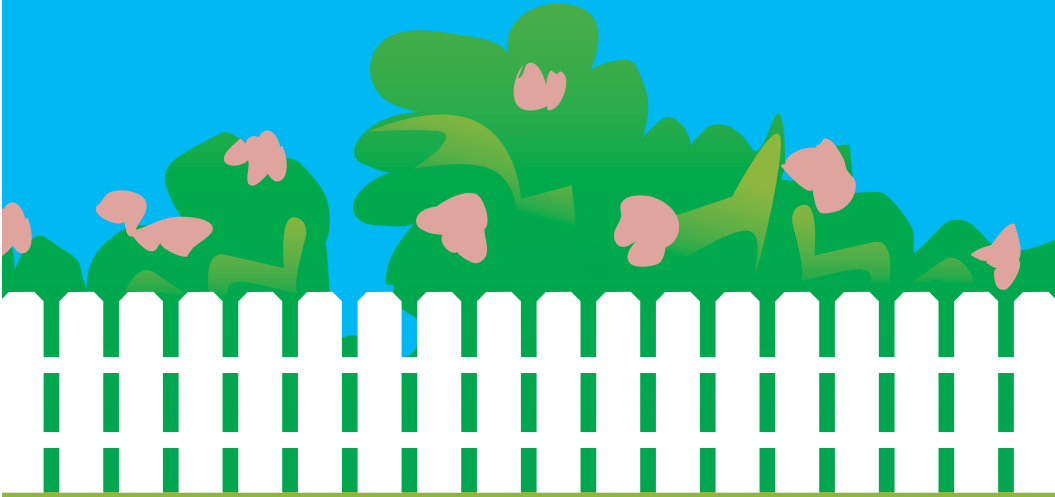


# Not in My Backyard!



## Uncovering the Dirty Secrets of Your Home **Sewage** System



# Your North Shore Home Sewage System:

No one wants to spend time thinking about sewage. But on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, citizens who ignore what goes down their drains may end up breaking both the law and their pocketbooks. They may also be shocked to discover raw sewage in the ditches around their homes.

An individual home sewage system is supposed to prevent human waste from contaminating

the environment. Most home systems include both a tank and a filtering system. The tank removes solids, and the filtering system reduces the amount of wastewater flowing from the tank into the environment. However, many north shore homes do not have filtering systems. Such households must follow special guidelines and disinfection procedures if they are to effectively cleanse their wastewater.

## Facts to Consider:

- ▶ If you do not receive a sewage charge on your water bill, you probably have an individual home sewage system.
- ▶ Louisiana law requires that homeowners maintain their individual home sewage systems. House-holds that discharge poorly treated sewage into the environment are in violation of the state sanitary code.
- ▶ Wastewater from the system's tank drains through an underground pipe into ditches just outside your property.
- ▶ If your system is not properly maintained, it will discharge poorly treated sewage (polluted water) directly into your neighborhood.

**When systems fail, sewage and contaminated wastewater flow into yards and ditches.**

## By Maintaining Your Home System You Can:

- ▶ **Protect your family's health.** When individual home sewage systems fail, sewage and contaminated wastewater flow into nearby yards and ditches. These pollutants contain harmful bacteria that can make people sick. By following a few guidelines, you can avoid this risk and keep your system functioning as it should.
- ▶ **Save money.** A new system will last 20 to 30 years, depending on the amount of water used in the home. But home systems are like cars: they need regular

maintenance, and they break down when used incorrectly. Replacing a home system costs thousands of dollars on average. Preventative maintenance is a much cheaper alternative.

- ▶ **Save the north shore's waterways.** Contaminated house-hold wastewater pollutes the north shore's rivers and bayous, as well as Lake Pontchartrain. In fact, sewage pollution can keep areas of Lake Pontchartrain and many other waterbodies off limits to swimmers. Proper management of individual home sewage systems is an important way to improve the north shore's quality of life.

## How to Identify Your System:

Aerated treatment units (ATUs) are the most common individual home sewage systems on the north shore. Look for a capped six-inch pipe sticking out of your yard. You may hear a rumbling inside the pipe when you stand near it. This is the sound of the water inside your system being aerated by the pump. The system also includes a

discharge pipe located at the edge of your property.

Septic systems can be found in older neighborhoods. Look for a strip of extra green grass about 5' wide and 50' long over the tank and drainage area. Many north shore septic systems have discharge pipes. They do not have aeration.



Typical Tank

# Maintenance of Your Home Sewage System

**Your individual home sewage system requires special care. Follow these guidelines to insure that the system functions properly.**

## Signs that Your Individual Home Sewage System Needs Attention:

1. You have added bathrooms or any water-using appliances to your home.
2. Your home sewage system is more than 20 years old.
3. It has been longer than five years since your system was pumped or inspected.
4. You allow heavy vehicles to drive or park on the tank area.
5. Rainwater from gutters and pumps reaches the tank area.
6. Trees or shrubs grow near or on the tank area.
7. You notice any of the following:
  - ▶ untreated sewage in nearby streams and ditches,
  - ▶ sewage backing up into the house,
  - ▶ slow draining toilets or drains, or
  - ▶ sewage odors.

## When to Inspect and Pump

Your system must be inspected and pumped regularly. The more water you use, the more often these procedures must be performed. Use this chart to determine a treatment schedule.

### When to Pump (In Years)


Tank Size (gal.)	PEOPLE PER HOUSEHOLD				
	1	2	3	4	5
500	6	3	2	1	1
750	9	4	3	2	1
900	11	5	3	2	2
1,000	12	6	4	3	2
1,250	16	8	5	3	3
1,500	19	9	6	4	3
1,750	22	11	7	5	4
2,000	25	12	8	6	5
2,250	29	14	9	7	5
2,500	31	16	10	8	6

## Choosing the Right Contractor

State regulations require that you use a licensed installer to inspect and repair your system. You must also use a licensed sewage hauler to pump out your system. Make sure the contractor is also insured. Compare estimates. The same contractor who inspects your system probably repairs, maintains, and installs systems. Be aware of the potential for a conflict of interest and take the time to check references.

## What to Expect During an Inspection

An adult should be present during the inspection. Locate any system plans or drawings in advance so the inspector can refer to them. The inspector will examine your system outside and check indoor plumbing as well. The inspector will also interview you about your household's water usage and waste disposal practices. Although some of the inspector's questions may seem personal, honest answers will help correct potentially costly problems. Ask the contractor for a written report detailing the inspection results, the location of your system, and any maintenance that needs to be performed.

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## Don't Just Dump It!

	cooking oil, butter, wax, cheese, heavy cream, coffee grounds.	bleach, tub and tile cleaners, drain cleaners, window cleaner, toilet bowl cleaners.	sanitary napkins, tampons, condoms, wrappers, bandages, facial tissues, napkins, gauze, dental floss, matches, cigarettes, medicines, hair, pet waste.	paint, gasoline, paint thinner, paint stripper, pesticides, insecticides, weed killer, antifreeze, lighter fluid, mothballs, photographic chemicals, turpentine, varnish, primer.	disposable diapers	paper towels	cat litter	grease	solvents	motor oil
<b>Toilet:</b>	X	●	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Drain:</b>	X	●	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Landfill:</b>	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>HAZARDOUS waste landfill:</b>	X	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	✓

## Alternative Cleaning Supplies

You may be accustomed to cleaning with bleach or harsh chemicals. But if used often and in large quantities, these materials will reduce your sewage system's ability to break down waste. Instead, try these alternatives for a clean, fresh smelling home:

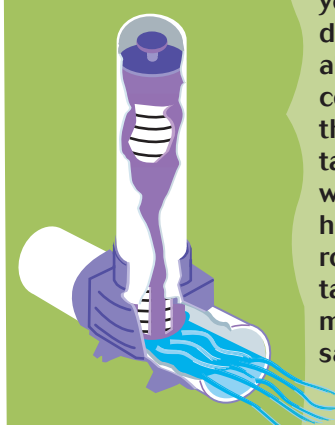
**To clean bathrooms:** Use baking soda as a mild abrasive cleaner for vanities and tubs. Or make a cheap and effective cleaning solution by mixing 1/2 cup non-sudsy ammonia, 1 pint of rubbing alcohol, and one tablespoon of dishwashing liquid. Add enough water to make a gallon.

**To clean toilets:** Use the all purpose cleaners above for the outside of the bowl. Brush the inside of the bowl with white vinegar, or a mixture of white vinegar and baking soda. Oil of wintergreen can also be used to remove odors.

**To remove soap scum:** Heat a mixture of one cup of white vinegar and one cup of water in a spray bottle. Coat the area, let stand ten minutes, and rinse.

**To clean drains:** Pour scalding water down the drains at least once a week. If the sink drain clogs, use a plunger, snake, or other mechanical device. If that approach fails, consider removing the U-shaped trap in the pipes where clogs often lodge. You may also remove the cleanout plug, if the trap has one.

## Disinfecting Your System



If your individual home sewage system has a discharge pipe, you should install a wastewater disinfecting unit. These affordable units include a small plastic container (about 18 inches tall) that dispenses disinfecting tablets. The unit helps sanitize wastewater without releasing harmful chemicals into the environment. **Note:** the disinfecting tablets are highly corrosive and must be handled with full safety precautions. Ask your plumber to find the appropriate unit and tablets for your system.

# Dos & Don'ts for Your System

## Do

- ✓ Keep a record of pumping, inspections, and other maintenance.
- ✓ Keep a sketch of your system handy for service visits.
- ✓ Conserve water to avoid overloading the system. Repair dripping faucets and leaking toilets, run washing machines and dishwashers only when full, avoid long showers, and use water-saving features in faucets, showerheads, and toilets.

- ✓ Distribute dish washing and laundry throughout the week. One or two loads a day are fine. Avoid showering and bathing when the dishwasher and/or laundry are in use.
- ✓ Use the garbage disposal sparingly. By increasing the amount of solids sent down the drain, it dramatically shortens the life of your system. If your home does not already have a garbage disposal, do not install one.
- ✓ Expect to upgrade your system every 20 years.

## Don't

- ✗ Allow anyone to build, dig, drive, or park over the tank area. Do not place gardens, swing sets, or sand boxes over the area.
- ✗ Install an individual home sewage system without obtaining the required health department permit.

- ✗ Use yeast, sugar, or commercial tank additives to improve the performance of your system. These products do not help and will hurt your system over time.
- ✗ Enter your tank or try to inspect it alone. Toxic gases are produced inside the tank that can kill in minutes.
- ✗ Wait until your system backs up to have it pumped. Once the sewage backs up, the damage is already done.

### MAINTENANCE CHART

Date	Service Performed	Service Performed By	Cost

SAVE OUR LAKE  
LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN BASIN FOUNDATION

## FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:



**The Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation:**  
504-836-2215  
[www.saveourlake.org](http://www.saveourlake.org)

**The Department of Health and Hospitals:**  
[www.dhh.state.la.gov](http://www.dhh.state.la.gov)

Mandeville Office 985-871-1300  
Slidell Office 985-646-6448  
Hammond Office 985-543-4175  
Amite Office 985-748-2020

**St. Tammany Environmental Services Department:**  
985-898-2535  
[www.stpgov.gov](http://www.stpgov.gov)

**National Small Flows Clearinghouse:**  
800-624-83015  
[www.nsfsc.wvu.edu](http://www.nsfsc.wvu.edu)

**Environmental Protection Agency**  
[www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)