

Winter

Closing a septic system for the winter is a vital task for seasonal homeowners to prolong the life of the system and to keep it operating at peak performance.

- If you are closing a cabin for the winter do not add automotive antifreeze, salts or any other additives to your plumbing.
- RV antifreeze can be added to traps in sinks, bathtub and shower drains, washtubs, floor drains and sump pumps.
- If you leave the water on for the winter, be very sure that there are no leaks or drips. This constant, low flow of water can cause septic system freezing.
- If you have a high efficiency furnace that is left on for the winter, be sure there is no water drip into your system. Freezing can result. Re-route the drip water to a floor drain, bucket or other source that does not enter the septic system
- Do not plow snow off the area or store plowed snow over the drainfield.
- Use water; the warmer the better if you feel the system is starting to freeze. The Onsite Sewage Treatment Program is usually an advocate of water conservation, but if freezing is a concern, increasing low use to a normal water use can help the system. This includes spreading out your laundry schedule to possibly doing one warm/hot load per day, using your dishwasher and maybe even taking a hot bath.
- If you know you are going to be gone for an extended period, plan accordingly. This could include having someone use sufficient quantities of water in the home regularly.

Additional resource: Minnesota Extension Service
<http://septic.umn.edu/owners/seasonalcare/index.htm>

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St. Louis County
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Seasonal Care for Your Septic System

Information on seasonal maintenance of on-site waste water treatment systems.



St. Louis County Environmental Services Department
On-site Waste Water Division

218-749-0625
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Spring

Here are some tips to get your septic system off to a good start for the coming summer.

- Watch the snow melt; if water is pooling over the tank or drainfield, channel it away.
- As the ground thaws, inspect the drainfield area for surfacing of sewage. Look for areas that stay wet, have standing water, or areas where the grass is greening up earlier than other areas. These may be signs of plugged or frozen piping.
- If you have an effluent filter in your tank now is a good time to clean it.
- Take a walk around your system. Are there water-seeking trees such as willows nearby? Their roots can extend out searching for available water, and may damage your septic tank. Remove these trees.
- When doing your spring cleaning, limit the amount of chemical products you use. Antibacterial and bleach cleansers can destroy the bacteria necessary for the septic tank.

Summer

- Mow but do not fertilize or water plantings over the drain field or mound.
- Any shallow rooted grasses or flowers may be planted over a drainfield or mound. Avoid deep rooted plants, shrubs and vegetables over your system. If native prairie grasses are used, manage by mowing - do not burn over this area. For landscaping suggestions go to the U of M extension site at <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/dg6986.html>
- Keep all vehicle traffic off the tank, pipes and soil treatment area. This includes 4-wheelers. The only exception is the lawn mower.



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Fall

Precautions taken in the fall can help prevent a frozen system.

- Stop cutting the grass over the tank and soil treatment area in mid-September. The extra grass length will help capture snow, providing insulation over the area. This can help prevent freezing.
- Place a layer of mulch (8-12 inches) over the pipes, tank and soil treatment system to provide extra insulation. This mulch could be straw, leaves, hay or any other loose material that will stay in place and not compact. This is particularly important if you have had a new system installed late in the year and no vegetative cover has been established.
- Make sure all risers; inspections pipes and manholes have covers on them. Sealing them and adding insulation is a good idea. Insulation may be added during construction particularly if the top of the septic tank is within 2 feet or the surface.

