

## **Caring for your septic system**

Any home or building that is not connected to a municipal or city sewage system requires a method for getting rid of human waste. The system must be properly designed and registered with the local public health authority.

The Lake Windermere Project's 2005 Lake-Use Survey showed that 58 percent of respondents use septic systems as their method of waste disposal. Septic systems are most common along the east side of Lake Windermere. If not properly maintained, they can have negative impacts on the lake habitat.

All septic systems need continuous attention to proper operation and maintenance. Systems should be inspected every year and in most cases need servicing every two to three years, depending on the number of people using the system, the daily volume of sewage flow and the proximity to a water body. "If a home is located along a water body, such as Lake Windermere, the septic system should be serviced every two years," recommends Bruce Dehart, operator of B. Dehart Enterprises septic tank pumping service.

If a system is not maintained properly, it can result in the premature failure requiring costly repairs or complete replacement. Some warning signs of septic failure include slow or backed up drains, marshy areas or areas of lush growth in your yard, or unpleasant smells. System failure can result in clogging, sewage backup, or overflow and effluent seepage into your yard.

There are many ways you can help protect your septic system and Lake Windermere.

Practice water conservation. Avoid overloading the system with too much water, for example, a running toilet or dripping faucet, or by watering on or near the drainfield.

Choose biodegradable household cleaners instead of toxic cleaners or bleach. Septic systems are biological systems for the treatment of wastewater; the tank contains bacteria that slowly digest the sludge. These bacteria are sensitive and can easily be upset by chemical products, requiring the system to be pumped more often. Toxic chemicals can also be carried to your drainfield and then into the ground water, eventually entering Lake Windermere.

Avoid flushing foreign matter of any kind, such as cigarette butts, newspaper, condoms, paper towels, paints, or solvents.

Be aware that human waste from people taking antibiotics or other medication can affect the performance of your septic system and may require more frequent pumping. Left-over medications should be returned to your pharmacy.

Avoid parking, driving or paving over your drainfield. This can compact the soil, crush pipes and keep air from getting into the ground – all of which can lead to system failure.

With proper knowledge and care of your septic system, you will be contributing to the protection of the ground and surface waters that are so important to the health of Lake Windermere.

For more information on properly maintaining your septic system contact the Lake Windermere Project at 341-6898. You can also visit the project office located in the old District of Invermere office beside the Invermere Community Centre. The Lake Windermere Project is a long-term, comprehensive stewardship program dedicated to safeguarding the health of our lake. The Lake Windermere Project is made possible by generous financial support from Environment Canada, Columbia Basin Trust and the Real Estate Foundation of B.C.