



Take Lake-Friendly Actions in Your Home



It is no secret; in most areas of New Hampshire, particularly in areas located away from town centers and along the shorelines of lakes and ponds, municipal sewer system service is not available. As a result, many residences and businesses are served by an on-site individual disposal system. The most common type of individual disposal system is the septic system. (Some waterfront properties in New Hampshire are served by municipal sewer treatment plants.)

Septic systems digest household wastes. The most common systems consist of a septic tank with a leach field connected to it. The septic tank holds solid waste, while the wastewater flows off into the leach field. The rocky soil around the leach pipes filters the water.

Nutrients, typically nitrogen and phosphorus, can build up in household wastes and are dissolved in the water that most often ends up in the leach field. Nutrients that do not get filtered out by the soil will eventually drain into groundwater or nearby waterbodies, including lakes. Phosphorus is the nutrient that, when present in excessive quantities in a waterbody, will cause increased plant and algal growth. In order to minimize this type of waterbody degradation, each of us must act wisely when addressing waste disposal in our home.

The following tips will help you reduce the amount of phosphorus from your household that flows into your septic system (or municipal treatment system) and ultimately into a lake, pond, river, or stream, and will help keep New Hampshire's waterbodies clean and healthy!

Conserve water.

- When you use less water, the possibility of nutrients leaking into nearby waterbodies is decreased.
- Take shorter, less frequent showers, turn off the water while brushing your teeth, and run laundry or dishwashing cycles with full loads only.

- Install water-saving devices in your toilet tank, sink faucets, and shower head.

Use cleaning products containing no phosphates.

- By choosing soaps and detergents containing no phosphates, you will avoid adding excess phosphorus into household wastewater, and ultimately into groundwater and surface waters.
- Just because something is biodegradable does not mean that it is good for the environment. Check the label for phosphates and other pollutants.
- You can purchase phosphate-free household products from environmentally-friendly companies.

Be careful what you flush.

- Heavy toilet paper, paper towels, and cigarette butts can clog septic systems and are not easily broken down by natural processes.
- Paint products, bleach, septic tank additives, and toilet deodorizers can kill the good bacteria in a septic system that break down waste, causing the waste to accumulate and the system to malfunction.

Compost your kitchen waste.

- Using a garbage disposal adds excess solid waste that can overburden the septic system, slow its function, and shorten its life.
- By decreasing the amount of solid waste in the system, you will not have to pump the tank as frequently.
- Composting kitchen and yard waste (away from the water) will help prevent nutrients from entering surface waters.

Inspect and pump your septic system.

- Have the tank and leach field inspected annually and have the tank pumped at least every two or three years. If settled solids are not removed from the tank, they can wash into and clog the leach field.
- Organize a neighborhood septic system pump-out. Together, you and your neighbors may be able to get a lower price!
- Keep deep-rooted trees and shrubs from growing on the leach field.
- Keep heavy vehicles from driving or parking on the leach field.
- Make sure that none of the pipes (such as the drain pipe from your washing machine) flow into or run off into streams, rivers, lakes, or ponds.
- Upgrade or replace the septic system if it is outdated or undersized. The typical life expectancy of a conventional septic system and leach field is approximately 20 years. If your system is approaching this age, or if you have added bedrooms and/or bathrooms to your house since the septic system was built, have the system evaluated by a licensed septic system installer to determine if it is appropriately sized and functioning properly.

NH LAKES is the only statewide, member-supported nonprofit organization working to keep New Hampshire's lakes clean and healthy, now and in the future. The organization works with partners, promotes clean water policies and responsible use, and inspires the public to care for our lakes. For information, visit www.nhlakes.org, email info@nhlakes.org, or call 603.226.0299. We hope that you will share this article with others—we just ask that you include the following: This article was originally published by NH LAKES. Thank you!