



Fact Sheet

Preparing Seasonal Cabin Septic Systems for Winter

By Valerie Prax, Regional Extension Educator

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

Protecting the system when winterizing the pipes in the cabin

- Do not add automotive antifreeze, salts or any other additives to your plumbing.
- 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.
- Even if the heat is left on, it is a good idea to fill the plumbing system with RV antifreeze. The antifreeze will prevent bacterial growth and keep the pipes fresh until flushed out at startup. To fill the system with antifreeze, first shut off the water and water heater (gas or electric) Drain the system by opening all the faucets and draining the water heater with a hose. For the antifreeze, use a pump type garden sprayer or electric pump to re-fill the system. Connect the pump to the hot water system. Close the inlet and outlet valves on the water heater (both are needed unless the outlet pipe is disconnected and the antifreeze is pumped from there). Fill the hot water plumbing by opening one faucet at a time, starting with the closest hot faucet to the water heater. Run each faucet until it flows pink. Start the dishwasher to fill the bottom. Follow the same steps to fill the cold water system, making sure all the piping and fixtures have antifreeze in them. You can also let some antifreeze into the water softener, filter and water heater. In the spring, flush the system out before using again.

Furnace

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.

Cleaning/pumping the septic tank

Consider pumping the tank if closing the cabin for the winter, or if it will only be used a few times during the winter. If you live in an area with a high water table, you should only pump out the tank if the tank was designed for high water table conditions. If a tank is left full but the system is not used for the winter months, the sewage will get very cold, and can even freeze. If the cabin is opened before temperatures in the tank start to rise, the effluent leaving the tank will be cold. By starting with an empty tank, you can then start fresh with warm effluent, which is desirable in the soil treatment area.

Vegetative Cover

Stop cutting the grass over the soil treatment area a couple weeks before the rest of the lawn. The extra growth will help insulate the area, and will help prevent freezing.

Protect the Soil Treatment Area

Keep all foot and vehicle traffic off the tank, pipes and soil treatment area (drainfield or mound). The only exception is the lawn mower. Mounds and drainfields are not 4-Wheeler jumps, walking paths, or for use by snowmobiles or cars.

For More Information

Please see our website at: <http://septic.umn.edu/> for more information about proper operation of septic