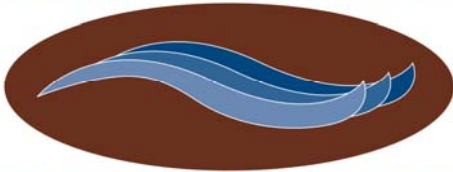


WEST MULTNOMAH



SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District Septic Maintenance and Well Water Workshop

Maintaining your septic system could mean the difference between spending \$350 every three years in pumping costs or as much as \$20,000 for a brand new drainfield. That's what over 50 participants heard at the West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District's Septic Maintenance & Well Water Workshop March 3, 2009 at the Skyline Grange.

For most households, pumping should be done every three years to keep solids out of the drainfield and prevent septic failure. Larger septic tanks used by a big family, for instance, could require more frequent pumping. Colbey Browne of Goodman Sanitation says other causes of septic failure are overloading the system, water leaks, placement of the tank in a poor drainage area or not installing the system according to code. He recommends homeowners be kind to their systems by not pouring grease down the drain, using their garbage disposal too much, and flushing cigarette butts and inorganic materials down the toilet. In addition, he warns, using salt and water softeners will harm the system...as will driving over your drainfield or allowing livestock access to the area.

Mike Ebeling and Erin Mick, with the Portland Bureau of Development Services, explained to participants how to site a septic system to make sure that soil, drainage and topography are adequate and that enough space is allowed for the proper drainfield. Mick said there are a lot of different types of septic systems on the market and you should be aware of what you have because some require much more maintenance than others. He noted that some of the new technology in waste water treatment will require maintenance as a condition for installation.

Roy Iwai, Water Resources Specialist for the Multnomah County Roads Department showed those in attendance data he has taken for three creeks (Abbey, Ross, and Bernard) that eventually flow into the Tualatin River. Iwai's data indicated that there may be times when certain water quality parameters exceed state and federal limits, though the sources are unknown at this time. Maintaining your septic system will make sure it doesn't overflow or leak into nearby rivers and streams.

In addition, Scott Gall, Conservation Planner with the WMSWCD, spoke to the group about Oregon Senate Bill 1010, which contains clean water requirements for rural landowners and agricultural

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operators. He suggested that homeowners and businesses remove any chemicals stored in well houses, ensure that sanitary seals are tight and that backflow protectors are installed on all outdoor faucets. He recommends that residents have their water tested for nitrates and coliform bacteria, which may signal that organisms are getting into your well and could be a human health hazard. Gall suggests testing once a year, after any work is done on the well or if you notice surface water not draining around the well. Gall cites OSU Extension which asks residents to limit the use of lawn and garden chemicals, protect their soil from oil, gasoline and household chemicals and shield animal waste from the rain.

Experts gave a lot of valuable information in the workshop but the overall message is “maintaining your septic system is a lot cheaper than having to deal with repair and astronomical replacement costs.”

The mission of the West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District is: “To conserve and protect soil and water resources for people, wildlife and the environment.”

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