



INTERNATIONAL
CODE
COUNCIL®

Private Sewage Disposal: Flushing Out the Facts

If you are not connected to a public sewer and instead rely on a private sewage disposal system to remove waste from your home, you'll want to read on so you can properly protect your plumbing system. You can cause great harm to your home, your family and even the environment if you're not familiar with the proper use and maintenance of your private sewage disposal system.

In fact, one careless flush of your toilet could have a negative impact on your yard, garden, or the places where your pets, children or grandchildren play. Even worse, you could compromise the safety of your home's water supply.

What is a Private Sewage Disposal System?

Private sewage disposal systems, sometimes referred to as onsite wastewater treatment and disposal systems, are typically underground treatment structures, commonly used in rural areas without centralized sewer systems. They use a combination of nature and proven technologies to treat wastewater from household plumbing produced by bathrooms, kitchen drains and laundry.

The most common septic system consists of a septic tank and a drain field, or soil absorption field (more commonly referred to as a leaching field).

The septic tank digests organic matter and separates floatable matter (e.g., oils, fats and grease) and solids from the wastewater collected within it. Soil-based systems discharge the liquid (known as effluent) from the septic tank into a series of perforated piping buried within the leaching field, chambers, or other units designed to slowly release the effluent into the soil.

How Private Sewage Affects the Planet

Lately, there's been more headlines about antimicrobial pollution which can be caused by compromised sewage disposal systems. In fact, The World Health Organization (WHO) recently released an [article](#) about it.

Septic systems can become a source of nutrient pollution if not properly maintained.

So how can we protect our private plumbing systems and the planet? You can start by not flushing that kitty litter...

What You Shouldn't Flush Down the Toilet

Deceased goldfish aside, people flush some pretty strange things down their toilets. Here are some materials and objects that should never be flushed down the toilet:

1. Medication
2. Disposable wipes
3. Coffee grounds
4. Grease & oil
5. Cigarette butts
6. Cotton swabs
7. Feminine hygiene products
8. Cat litter
9. Latex condoms
10. Disposable wipes
11. Paper towels and facial tissues
12. Water softener discharge, bleach, chemicals and harsh cleaners
13. Dental floss



Safe Disposal of Medication & Chemicals

One of the trickiest things to safely dispose of is unused medication. Here are a few tips to make it easy:

Community-Sponsored Drug Take Back Programs

Many communities have [drug take back programs](#) so check with your local law enforcement officials to find a location near you. You can also check with the DEA to find a DEA-authorized collector in your community.

Pharmacy Take Back Programs

Some pharmacies offer on-site medicine drop-off boxes, mail-back programs and other ways to help you safely dispose of your unused medicines.

National Prescription Drug Take Back Day

The [National Prescription Drug Take Back Day](#) aims to provide a safe, convenient and responsible means of disposing of prescription drugs, while also educating the public about the potential for abuse of medications. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) sponsors National Prescription Drug Take Back Day in communities nationwide – so, check your calendar.

The FDA Flush List

If you don't have a drug take back location near you, check the FDA's [flush list](#) to see if your medicine is on the list. Medicines on the flush list are (1) sought-after for their misuse and/or abuse potential and (2) that can result in death from one dose if inappropriately taken. These medications can be flushed, but remember not to flush anything that is not on the flush list.

Septic System Maintenance 101

Just like your digestive system, your septic system has 'good' bacteria present that helps to dissolve organic waste. While it's fine to use septic treatments occasionally, you'll want to avoid overuse.

- Have your system inspected regularly and pump your tank as necessary
- Use water efficiently {Too much water is NOT good for your leaching field}
- Don't dispose of household hazardous wastes in sinks or toilets {Your toilet is NOT a trash can}
- Avoid driving vehicles or placing heavy objects on the drain fields



The 2021 International Private Sewage Disposal Code® (IPSDC)



There is a code for just about everything – including personal waste.

The 2021 IPSDC provides requirements for inspection of private sewage disposal systems and addresses the best practices and technologies to ensure the safety and welfare of communities, individuals and businesses that utilize their own on-site wastewater solutions.

The IPSDC has been adopted in 20 states, Puerto Rico and Guam. Approximately 182 million people, or 54% of the U.S. population, live in areas that have adopted the IPSDC. The IPSDC is innovative, efficient, effective and fully correlated with the other 14 International Codes® (I-Codes®).

You can read more about the IPSDC by visiting [here](#).

