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# On-site Sewage System Homeowner's Manual

## — Mound System —

(THIS MANUAL INCLUDES SYSTEM SPECIFICATIONS AND INFORMATION  
SPECIFICALLY FOR THE SEWAGE SYSTEM AT THE ADDRESS BELOW)

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Provided by

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Designer of the On-site Sewage System serving the address above

Developed by Public Health — Seattle & King County

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(Produced with funding from the Public Involvement And Education Project, financed by proceeds from the Washington State Water Quality Account and administered by the Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team.)

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Parcel Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Property Owner:

Please take some time to read through this manual. Familiarity with its contents is essential for proper operation and maintenance of your on-site sewage ("septic") system (**OSS**). This manual is for your use, and maintenance persons also will need the manual for reference, in order to correctly service and adjust your OSS. Proper operation and maintenance will assure the maximum life span from your OSS, potentially saving you thousands of dollars. **Waiting until the OSS malfunctions before informing yourself about its operation can be very costly.** As outlined in this manual (See OSS CARE), state and county board of health regulations include a number of requirements that OSS owners must fulfill. Your habits and life style must accommodate the limitations of the OSS serving your property, as described in this manual. Keep the manual with your important papers.

## OVERVIEW

This brief OVERVIEW is intended to provide a general orientation concerning your OSS and guide you to some key sections of this manual. We strongly suggest that you also refer to the **Table of Contents on page 6** and review the entire manual.

Historically, the most common type of OSS was a simple system consisting of a septic tank, some pipe in gravel, and the soils found on the site. Septic tanks with gravity flow drainfields have been used for many years in areas not served by public sewers. However, in King County and many other areas, soil and other conditions on sites now available for new construction often are not well suited for these conventional systems. To protect public health and water quality, alternative systems are used in these areas where conventional systems cannot assure safe, effective sewage treatment for the life of the home or facility being served. **Your property is served by such an alternative on-site sewage treatment and disposal system, a "MOUND SYSTEM".**

This manual will help you understand your mound system and keep it operating safely at the lowest possible cost. **The key to proper operation of any OSS is to provide conditions under which sewage that has been clarified in a septic tank (called "effluent") is kept in an environment where air can contact the effluent.** This allows beneficial bacteria to consume the harmful components of the effluent, such as disease-causing bacteria. Other harmful components, such as viruses, can be retained in relatively dry soils or sand until they are decomposed. The mound helps ensure that wastewater will have adequate contact with air to facilitate treatment.

## **YOUR AS-BUILT DRAWING**

"As-built" is short for "as it is built". An *as-built drawing* is a scaled drawing showing the location of all OSS components (e.g., septic tank, pump tank, reserve area, etc.) in relation to buildings and property boundaries. You should become familiar with this drawing and the location of your OSS components. The drawing is included in this manual (see APPENDIX B.)

## **SYSTEM MAINTENANCE**

Information that follows will outline maintenance procedures (see PERIODIC MAINTENANCE) and special precautions (see DOs AND DON'Ts and OSS CARE) you should take to maximize OSS effectiveness and life expectancy. Some of these are legally required (see OSS CARE). Maintaining a mound system requires a lot more than just pumping the septic tank. Since you, the owner, are responsible for the operation and maintenance of your OSS, it is in your best interest to understand how your mound system functions and the maintenance it requires. **Waiting to educate yourself about your OSS until the system backs up or sewage surfaces in your yard will virtually guarantee that the system will require an expensive repair. Repair or replacement of a mound commonly costs in excess of \$5,000.**

## **SYSTEM MALFUNCTIONS**

*The purpose of any individual OSS is to treat and dispose of all wastewater being produced by a household or business. Part of the treatment process is the removal of harmful microorganisms from the wastewater before they can contaminate ground or surface waters. Many of the microorganisms in sewage are known to cause human diseases such as hepatitis, shigellosis, poliomyelitis, cholera, typhoid, bacillary dysentery, amoebic dysentery, and various parasitic worm infestations. **Untreated sewage is definitely capable of spreading disease.***

***If an OSS malfunctions, wastewater will often leak to the ground's surface before being adequately treated. This poses a serious health concern. If this happens you should:***

1. Avoid contact with the sewage.
2. Contact the County Health Department for more specific information (see IMPORTANT NAMES AND PHONE NUMBERS).
3. Call the appropriate service company, generally your system maintainer (see IMPORTANT NAMES AND PHONE NUMBERS).
4. Begin immediately to severely limit water use (see WATER CONSERVATION).
5. Contain the surfacing sewage and do not allow pets or children near it.

Note: *If sewage backs up into the house, contact the Health Department for details concerning appropriate ways to cleanup and sanitize the contaminated area. The brochure *Guidelines For Cleaning Indoor Sewage Spills* may be obtained by calling the Health Department, at (206) 296-4932.*

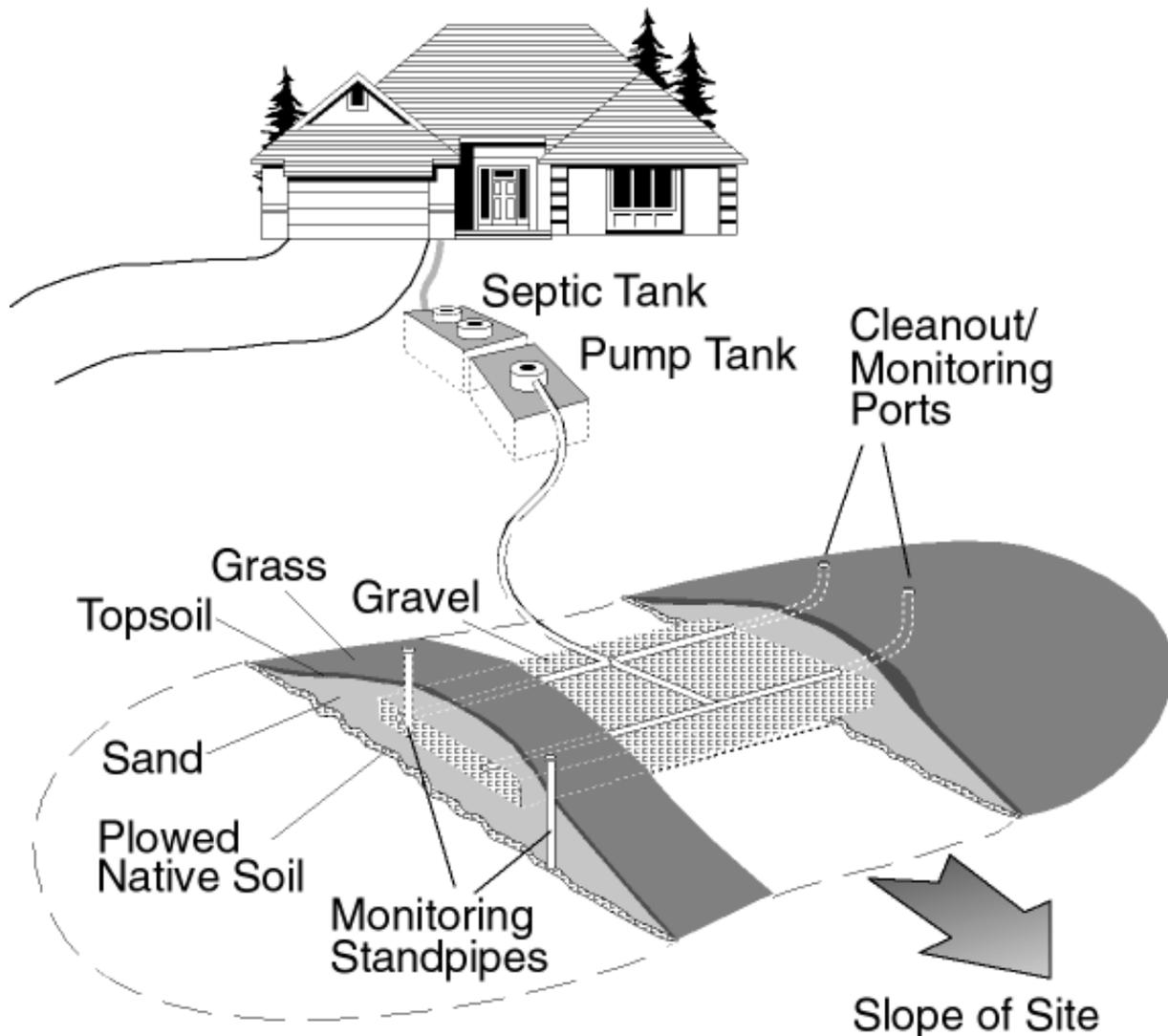
See ALARM TROUBLESHOOTING, HOW MUCH WATER CAN YOUR OSS HANDLE, POWER FAILURES, and PERIODIC MAINTENANCE for more information related to OSS malfunctions.

### **THE MOUND SYSTEM**

A typical mound system has four main parts:

1. The septic tank with its outlet baffle filter (see SEPTIC TANK PUMPING and TANK BAFFLES),
2. The pump tank with its pump, controls, and alarm system (see SEPTIC TANK PUMPING and PUMP TANK AND PUMP CONTROLS),
3. The mound itself and the surrounding native soils ( see MOUND AND SITE INSPECTION),
4. The area for a replacement mound, the “reserve area” (see THE RESERVE AREA).

## **Mound System**



The mound is a drainfield constructed using a specific sand fill material. Within the sand fill is a gravel bed (or a system of plastic chambers) supporting a network of small-diameter pipes. Septic tank effluent is pumped through the pipes in controlled doses to insure uniform distribution throughout the bed. The effluent squirts from the pipes under low pressure through small diameter holes and trickles down into the sand. Treatment of the effluent occurs as it comes into contact with air while slowly moving through the sand and into the natural soil below. The purpose of the mound is to purify household wastewater before it comes into contact with groundwater.

The mound is built above the original soil surface and appears as a rise, bump, or berm in the yard. It is designed for use on sites with shallow permeable soils above the water table or over an impermeable soil layer. On these sites, during the wet fall and winter months, there generally are less than 2.5 feet of permeable soil above the water table. Unsaturated soil is an essential part of any on-site sewage treatment and disposal system. This natural, unsaturated soil provides the oxygen required by beneficial soil bacteria to treat and purify the wastewater, minimizing harmful bacteria. It is important to understand that once the soil becomes saturated it loses most of its treatment capacity. The mound helps ensure that wastewater will have adequate contact with air to facilitate treatment. It gives beneficial bacteria more time and space in which to clean up the wastewater. It is generally felt that a minimum of approximately three feet of total useable soil depth (e.g., unsaturated native soil + mound sand) is required for adequate sewage treatment.

### **THE RESERVE AREA**

Every new mound is required to have a designated replacement (reserve) area. This reserve area must be protected for future use when the existing mound needs an addition or replacement. When, hopefully after many years of operation, your mound needs to be replaced, the reserve area should be ready to accommodate a new mound installation. If you damage the reserve area, it will not be usable as a mound site. Soil-disturbing activities such as paving, grading, excavating, construction, or compaction must not occur in and around this dedicated area and designated setback areas. *It is imperative that you maintain and protect the reserve area like your house depended on it, because it does!* The location of your reserve area is shown on your system's as-built drawing (see APPENDIX B).

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# MOUND SYSTEM DOs AND DON'Ts

## *DOs*

1. Become familiar with your mound's operation by reading this manual.
2. Practice water conservation measures (see **WATER CONSERVATION** and **HOW MUCH WATER CAN YOUR OSS HANDLE?**)
3. Compost food wastes rather than grinding them through the garbage disposal and into the mound system (see **GARBAGE DISPOSALS**).
4. Divert all surface drainage and roof drains away from the mound and sewage tanks (see **ACTIVITIES NEAR THE SYSTEM** and **LANDSCAPING AND SOIL PROTECTION**).
5. Maintain your system by having it checked by a professional annually, and by protecting the system from physical damage (see **OWNER RESPONSIBILITIES** and **PERIODIC MAINTENANCE**).
6. Know where all your septic system components are located. (see **APPENDIX B, AS-BUILT DRAWING**).
7. Space your laundry loads throughout the week to avoid periodic OSS overloading (see **HOW MUCH WATER CAN YOUR OSS HANDLE?**).
8. Perform regular inspections around the mound looking for wet soils and other signs of problems (see **MOUND AND SITE INSPECTION**).
9. Watch an educational video on understanding and maintaining your mound system available from the Health Department. For details, phone (206) 296-4932 (see **IMPORTANT NAMES AND PHONE NUMBERS**).
10. Plant a drought-resistant grass or other shallow-rooted ground cover to prevent erosion of the mound surface (see **LANDSCAPING AND SOIL PROTECTION**).

## *DON'Ts*

1. Don't dig into or near the mound or its reserve area (see **LANDSCAPING AND SOIL PROTECTION**).
2. Don't raise or lower the level of the ground on the mound, or within about 30 feet from it, or in the reserve area (see **LANDSCAPING AND SOIL PROTECTION**).
3. Don't cover the mound or the area around it with impermeable materials (e.g., clay soils, plastic sheets, concrete blocks, or paved walkways) (see **LANDSCAPING AND SOIL PROTECTION**).
4. Don't disturb or compact the soil over the mound, or in the area within 30 feet down slope from the mound, or in the reserve area (see **ACTIVITIES NEAR THE SYSTEM**).
5. Don't remove or damage the inspection ports in the mound (see **MOUND AND SITE INSPECTION**).
6. Don't plant plants other than shallow-rooted ones on or near the mound (see **LANDSCAPING AND SOIL PROTECTION**).
7. Don't do more than one or two loads of laundry on any one day (see **HOW MUCH WATER CAN YOUR OSS HANDLE?**).
8. Don't use a garbage disposal (see **GARBAGE DISPOSALS**).
9. Don't drive on or within about 30 feet from the mound (see **ACTIVITIES NEAR THE SYSTEM**).
10. Don't dispose of any inappropriate materials, such as cooking grease or oil wastes, paint products, or hazardous chemicals down the drains (see **WHAT CAN AND CANNOT GO DOWN THE DRAIN**).
11. Don't use septic tank additives. They are rarely, if ever, useful (see **ADDITIVES**).
12. Don't build any structure over the tanks or on or within about 30 feet from the mound, or in the reserve area (see **ACTIVITIES NEAR THE SYSTEM**).
13. Don't drain a hot tub (or large amounts of water in general) into your OSS (see **HOW MUCH WATER CAN YOUR OSS HANDLE?**).
14. Don't clean paintbrushes (used for either oil-based or water-based paint) into sinks or other drains that lead to the OSS (see **WHAT CAN AND CANNOT GO DOWN THE DRAIN**).
15. Don't install a sprinkler system on or within about 10 feet from the mound and the tanks (see **ACTIVITIES NEAR THE SYSTEM**). Also, make sure that your sprinkler system is equipped with approved back-flow prevention devices

# SPECIFICATIONS AND TROUBLESHOOTING

Installation Permit No. \_\_\_\_\_

Parcel No. \_\_\_\_\_

Designer: \_\_\_\_\_

Master Installer: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of OSS Testing: \_\_\_\_\_

Permanent wiring of OSS and connection to electric utility completed at time of test?

Yes       No

## SPECIFICATIONS FOR ELECTRICAL AND MECHANICAL COMPONENTS

### 1. Septic Tank

- a. Manufacturer: \_\_\_\_\_ Model # \_\_\_\_\_  
b. Supplier: \_\_\_\_\_  
c. Size (gallons): \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Effluent Filter Baffle Installed Yes    No

- a. Manufacturer: \_\_\_\_\_ Model #: \_\_\_\_\_  
b. Supplier: \_\_\_\_\_  
c. Access for Service Is Via: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Pump Tank

- a. Manufacturer: \_\_\_\_\_ Model #: \_\_\_\_\_  
b. Supplier: \_\_\_\_\_  
c. Size (gallons) : \_\_\_\_\_  
d. Access to Ground Surface  Yes     No  
e. Gallons Per Inch of Tank Depth: \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. Pump

- a. Type: \_\_\_\_\_ H.P. : \_\_\_\_\_ Voltage: \_\_\_\_\_ Amperage: \_\_\_\_\_  
b. Total Dynamic Head: \_\_\_\_\_  
c. Manufacturer: \_\_\_\_\_ Model #: \_\_\_\_\_  
d. Supplier: \_\_\_\_\_  
e. System Dose Volume (gallons) : \_\_\_\_\_  
f. Inches of Drawdown Per Dose Cycle: \_\_\_\_\_  
g. Number of Doses Per 24 Hours: \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. Pump Electrical Controls

- a. Panel  
(1) Manufacturer: \_\_\_\_\_ Model #: \_\_\_\_\_  
(2) Supplier: \_\_\_\_\_  
(3) Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
(4) Pump Elapsed Time Meter?     Yes     No  
(5) Pump Cycle Counter?         Yes     No  
b. Alarm-Visual and Audible?     Yes     No

(1) Manufacturer: \_\_\_\_\_ Model #: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (2) Supplier: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (3) Location: \_\_\_\_\_

c. Floats

(1) Type: \_\_\_\_\_ Model #: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (2) Manufacturer: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (3) Supplier: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (4) Settings - elevation in pump chamber (inches above the tank bottom)for:  
 On: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Off: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Redundant Off: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Alarm: \_\_\_\_\_

d. Which circuit breaker in the main electric service panel controls the:

(1) Pump Controls: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (2) Alarm: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Pump Timer: This Pump System Does  Does Not  Have a Timer.

- a. It is located: \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Manufacturer: \_\_\_\_\_ Model #: \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Supplier: \_\_\_\_\_
- d. It is set to allow pump operation when needed for \_\_\_\_\_ minutes (to nearest tenth of a minute) with \_\_\_\_\_ hours (to nearest tenth of a hour) off between doses, to deliver \_\_\_\_\_ gallons per dose up to \_\_\_\_\_ time(s) per day.
- e. The timer runs - continuously (A)  - only when the float switch is "on" (B)   
 If (B), when timer starts running, it allows pump to begin running after \_\_\_\_\_ hours.

7. Distribution System

- a. Flow control valves used?  Yes, Type: \_\_\_\_\_  No
- b. Valves accessible from ground's surface?  Yes  No
- c. Check valves in manifold?  Yes  No
- d. Check valves accessible from ground surface?  Yes  No

Exact location of all valves:

\_\_\_\_\_

- e. Lateral Diameter: \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Orifice Diameter: \_\_\_\_\_
- g. Orifice Orientation:  6 o'clock  12 o'clock
- h. Orifice Shields Installed:  Yes  No (Not required with 60'clock orientation)

i.

| Laterals                                           | #1 | #2 | #3 | #4 | #5 | #6 | #7 |
|----------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Lateral Length (feet)                              |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Lateral Elevation - relative to pump intake (feet) |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |

|                                     |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Number of Orifices                  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Orifice Spacing                     |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Residual head (feet) at lateral end |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

j. Method used for estimating residual head?: \_\_\_\_\_

## **ALARM**

Code requires that the pump and alarm be on different breakers so that, if the pump breaker trips, the alarm can still operate. If the fluid within the pump tank rises beyond the normal pump "on" level, the alarm warning light will come on and an alarm will sound. This indicates that the pump probably has malfunctioned, or, if the system is equipped with a timer, the water level in the pump tank is unusually high because you are using more water than the system is designed to handle. Either way, you should immediately begin severe water conservation measures, which would include avoiding showers, baths, and washing clothes or dishes.

**NOTE: To silence the alarm, push the reset button on the alarm box. The audible signal will be deactivated but this will not solve the problem.**

There is at least one day's emergency wastewater storage capacity of \_\_\_\_\_ gallons built into the system. This should allow you enough time to get the problem corrected. Generally you will want to call the company that installed your OSS or an OSS maintenance firm that employs a qualified electrician to help to diagnose and correct the problem (see IMPORTANT NAMES AND PHONE NUMBERS).

## **ALARM TROUBLESHOOTING**

(Also see **TIMERS** and **POWER FAILURES**.)

**If the Alarm Sounds** - At this point, you may want to check for any obvious problems before calling a service company:

- (1) Check for a tripped circuit breaker in your home's circuit breaker panel;
- (2) Determine whether an unusual amount of water has been used within the last eight hours that may have overloaded the pump tank (if so, using little water for up to twelve hours should cause the problem to correct itself);
- (3) Check for a pump or float switch plug that has become disengaged. Look for a plug-in electrical box on the outside wall of the house near the pump tank. If you cannot find such a box, your system is probably wired direct.

If there are no obvious problems you can identify, the problem may be within the pump tank, or the pipe from the pump to the mound, or within the mound could, be clogged. It is best to contact a service person to troubleshoot the system from here (see IMPORTANT NAMES AND PHONE NUMBERS). Be aware that mounds are sophisticated on-site systems and not every OSS maintainer, installer, or designer will be well versed or equally capable of troubleshooting or repairing them. Consult the Health Department for more information.

**WARNING:**  
**NEVER ENTER A SEPTIC TANK OR PUMP TANK. PEOPLE HAVE DIED IN SEPTIC AND PUMP TANKS. THEY CONTAIN TOXIC GASES AND LITTLE OR NO OXYGEN.**

## **TIMERS**

The timer is used as a safeguard, protecting the mound from receiving too much wastewater during a given time period. The timer controls the maximum number of pump cycles per day and ensures that the doses are spread out to allow adequate resting periods between doses. Each pump cycle is designed to deliver a calculated amount, or dose, of effluent to the mound. The size and frequency of the doses are based on the quantity of wastewater that the mound can handle without becoming overloaded. If your household generates more than that quantity, the timer will limit the amount sent to the mound. The remaining wastewater will be stored in the pump tank until the timer activates the next pump cycle. In instances where more wastewater is generated than the mound is designed to accept, the tank may temporarily overflow and the alarm will sound. You must then determine the cause for the alarm (see ALARM TROUBLESHOOTING). **If the cause is not mechanical in nature, then the problem is probably too much water entering the septic and pump tanks.** You are probably using more water in a short time than your mound will handle (or water could be leaking into one of your tanks). Checking your water bill will help determine whether you are using too much water.

When the problem is due to excessive wastewater generated within the household, immediately begin water conservation measures until the pump can catch up with the wastewater overload. This becomes a warning that you are exceeding the design capacity of the system. Appropriate water use habits will eliminate this problem. If you have been generating excessive wastewater loads even though you do not feel that you have been using excessive water, the source of the excess water could be either a leaking plumbing fixture (toilet or faucet) or ground and surface water entering the tanks. A check of all indoor plumbing fixtures (e.g., toilet tanks) can rule them out as the source.

If you are not using excess water, leakage into the tanks could be a problem (see HOW MUCH WATER CAN YOUR OSS HANDLE?).

***IMPORTANT:*** You must not attempt to remedy alarm warnings by making adjustments to the timer or switching the system to a manual operating mode. Only your system maintainer, designer, or installer should ever adjust the timer settings. Most timers are complex. Altering the timer settings can void any warranty on the OSS. Adjustments could cause an overdosing of the mound, which leads to mound failure. Mound failures are very expensive to correct.

# IMPORTANT NAMES AND PHONE NUMBERS

## (1) System Designer

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

The designer is responsible for the design of your mound OSS and providing you with this manual. This individual oversaw the installation, testing, and final soil cover placement, and completed the as-built drawings of your system. The designer can answer specific questions regarding your systems operation and performance. Some design firms may provide OSS monitoring and maintenance services as well.

## (2) System Installer

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

The installer is the person or company that built your system, based upon the designer's specifications and design drawings. Installers are certified to repair existing systems as well as construct new systems. County regulations, based on years of experience, require almost all repair work to be done by a certified installer.

**NOTE: Any repairs to your OSS will require a repair permit from the Health Department See # (4), below. For simple repairs the permitting process has been greatly streamlined.**

## (3) System Maintainer

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

The system maintainer is a person certified to perform the **required periodic monitoring** of this OSS, as well as problem diagnosis and preventive maintenance. In some cases this may be the same person who designed the OSS. For mound systems, King County regulations require that a county certified OSS monitor perform the following periodic maintenance:

- 6 months after the approval of the installation of the mound system (This first monitoring may be done by either your OSS designer or system maintainer.), and
- Annually

**The System Maintainer is to complete an annual OSS operation and performance inspection and report its results, on forms provided by the health officer, to the OSS owner at the time of monitoring and to the health officer within 30 days.** A sample monitoring form is attached to this manual (see APPENDIX). System maintainers also may do simple “limited repairs” (such as repair to a broken pipe, lid, or pump) to the OSS. Only an OSS installer may do more complex repairs.

(4) **Health Department (Seattle/King County Department of Public Health)**

The Eastgate district office handles most OSS-related activity within King County.

**Address: 14350 SE Eastgate Way, Bellevue, 98007      Phone:(206) 296-4932**

The Health Department is the educational and regulatory agency for all activities related to your OSS. It can provide you with answers to general questions and printed information. It also keeps records on file of your system's design, installation and as-built drawing. Staff can provide lists of OSS maintainers, designers, installers, and pumpers certified to practice in King County. The Health Department issues permits for the installation and repair of all OSS's and can answer any questions regarding repair procedures and requirements.

(5) **OSS Pumpers**

These businesses must be certified by the health department to pump sewage tanks in King County. They can do routine or emergency pumping of your septic tank and can do tank inspection. They are not permitted to repair septic systems or do overall OSS inspection unless they also have a valid installer or maintainer's certificate from the health department.

(6) **Plumbers**

Plumbers may troubleshoot and repair any plumbing problems inside your home. They are not allowed to do repairs to your OSS unless they have a valid OSS installer's certificate.

# OSS CARE

## **OWNER RESPONSIBILITIES**

**For mound systems, OSS regulations require that periodic monitoring is performed by a county-certified OSS maintainer (See IMPORTANT NAMES AND PHONE NUMBERS):**

- **6 months after the approval of the installation of the mound system (this first monitoring may be done by either your OSS designer or system maintainer.), and**
- **Annually, on or before the anniversary of the date of approval of the installation.**

A complete OSS operation and performance evaluation is to be conducted during each required monitoring. A system monitoring report, on forms provided by the Health Department (see APPENDIX A), is to be submitted by the maintainer to the OSS owner at the time of inspection and to the Health Department within 30 days of the inspection.

**As stated in Title 13 of the Code of the King County Board of Health, the OSS owner is responsible for the continuous proper operation and maintenance of the OSS, and must:**

1. For residential systems with no garbage disposal, determine the level of solids and scum in the septic tank at least once every three (3) years. If a garbage disposal is installed, or the OSS serves a business, make this determination once every year.
2. Employ an approved pumper to remove the septage from the septic tank when the level of solids and scum indicates that removal is necessary. (See PERIODIC MAINTENANCE for instructions regarding how this is determined.)
3. Have regular preventive maintenance/system performance monitoring inspections conducted and any indicated service performed by a certified person.
4. Operate and maintain the OSS in accordance with Title 13, with pertinent alternative system guidelines issued by the Washington Department of Health (DOH) and with this OSS owner's manual. Title 13 requirements and DOH requirements are summarized in this manual.
5. Protect the OSS area, including the reserve area, from:
  - a. Cover by structures or impervious material;
  - b. Surface drainage;
  - c. Soil compaction, for example, by vehicular traffic or livestock; and
  - d. Damage by soil removal and grade alteration.
6. Maintain the flow of sewage to the OSS at or below the approved design limits for both quantity and waste strength.
7. Direct drains, such as footing or roof drains, and surface water away from the area where the OSS is located.

**The owner must not allow:**

1. Use or introduction of strong bases, strong acids or organic solvents into the OSS for the purpose of system cleaning.
2. Use of a sewage system additive unless it is specifically approved by the DOH, and
3. Use of an OSS to dispose of waste components atypical of residential wastewater, for example, but not limited to, petroleum products, paints (including latex), solvents, or pesticides.

**The following is practical advice concerning how to extend the operating life of your OSS and meet the requirements listed above.**

## **ACTIVITIES NEAR THE SYSTEM**

You should not build on, excavate, pave, drive over, or allow livestock on any parts of the system, including the reserve area. Particularly critical to a mound on a sloping site is the area within 30 feet down slope from the mound. This is the area where most of the treated wastewater will travel as it is absorbed into the native soils. For mounds on relatively flat, level sites it is important not to compact the soils or alter the site within 30 feet in any direction from the mound. It is very important that this area remain undisturbed.

Homeowners should protect the mound and surrounding area and inspect it on a regular basis. Wet spots on or near the mound are potential indicators of advanced problems or OSS failure.

## **LANDSCAPING AND SOIL PROTECTION**

Grass or vegetation with shallow non-penetrating roots is the best cover for your mound. The grass should be of a shallow rooted but drought resistance type. Perennial rye mixed 50/50 with tall or fine fescue, “Northwest Mix”, is a readily available good choice. New blends, which include these grasses along with clover and other broadleaf plants, will stay greener in the summer without watering and fertilizer. *Eco-lawn* and *Fleur de Lawn* are two available brands.

Since the native, natural soil is required for completing the treatment process it must not be disturbed or altered. Digging through or compacting the soil, e.g., by driving over it, destroys the structure of the soil and greatly reduces its ability to provide sewage treatment. Anyone who has dug a hole and then tried to refill it has witnessed the destruction of soil structure. That is why there rarely seems to be enough dirt left to refill the hole.

Sprinkler systems should not be installed in or within about 10 feet from the OSS for three reasons:

- (1) damage to the mound by digging into it to install the sprinkler;
- (2) the additional water load to the mound, and
- (3) the crossing of sewer and water lines is generally not permitted due to the potential for contaminating drinking water with sewage.

With lawn care equipment, such as riding lawn mowers or tractors, be careful not to travel on the mound, or the downslope area when the soil is saturated, as during wet wintertime. Winter landscape work on the mound should be avoided to minimize frost penetration or compaction.

Any landscaping you choose to do must not adversely alter or disturb the mound or the soils around it. You should not place fill soils over the mound or the ground around it. This will block airflow into the mound and greatly reduce its effectiveness and shorten its operating life. Placing concrete or asphalt sections or plastic sheets over the mound also reduces the supply of oxygen to the soil necessary for the sewage treatment process.

Planting a vegetable garden over the mound is not recommended.

### **IMPORTANT:**

**Do not allow any surface runoff to be directed onto or around the mound or reserve area. Equally important, do not allow any construction or ground compaction in the reserve area or within 30 feet down slope from the mound.**

## **ADDITIVES**

**The Health Department recommends against the use of septic tank additives of any type.** Septic tank additives will not reduce the need for septic tank pumping. Some additives may actually cause solids to be carried out of the septic tank and into the mound. This will begin plugging the mound bed, gradually causing it to fail. Other additives may pass into the soil and pollute the groundwater. In Washington State persons may not use, sell, or distribute any septic system additive unless the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has evaluated the additive for safety. DOH approval indicates only that an additive is not known to be harmful, not that it is known to be useful. DOH evaluation of additives does not include investigation of the validity of performance claims by manufacturers. Manufacturers' use of the word "approved" is prohibited, but a product may be advertised as "complying with Washington laws regarding harm to public health and water quality."

## **WHAT CAN AND CANNOT GO DOWN THE DRAIN**

Your OSS is for treatment of typical kitchen, bathroom, and laundry wastewater and should not be used as a disposal site for other types of waste. Any materials that do not readily biodegrade within the septic tank should not be flushed down a toilet or poured down a drain. This would include sanitary napkins, tampons, coffee grounds, grease or oils of any kind, hair, "disposable" diapers, cigarette butts, paper towels, paper napkins, newspaper, all paints (**latex paint is very bad for filter baffles and the mound!**), solvents, degreasers, pesticides, caustic drain cleaners or oven cleaner, or any toxins. Large quantities of disinfectants (e.g., bleach) should also be kept out of your septic tank. Even dental floss has been known to cause problems. Normally spaced clothes washing or household cleaning chores should not pose a threat to your system.

Prolonged, routine use of some types of prescription drugs, such as chemotherapy drugs or antibiotics, may be harmful to your system. If you suspect that drugs are disrupting your OSS it is best to have your system maintainer arrange for sample collection and testing of the system effluent. S/he can check your OSS and determine whether problems are occurring. Early detection will prevent permanent harm. There is also evidence that the repeated, frequent purging associated with the eating disorder bulimia can damage an OSS by making the sewage very acidic, killing bacteria required for normal OSS operation.

## **GARBAGE DISPOSALS**

It is recommended that a garbage disposal not be used. If you must use it do so very sparingly. Garbage disposals, by design, use large volumes of water and pass significant quantities of suspended solids into the septic tank. Garbage disposals very commonly overload OSSs. If you use the disposal you will need to have the septic tank pumped much more frequently. Regardless of the frequency of septic tank pumping, garbage disposals will increase the waste concentration, which can overload the mound. When you consider the total cost associated with operating a garbage disposal, it might be the most expensive appliance in your home.

## **HOW MUCH WATER CAN YOUR OSS HANDLE?**

Each OSS is designed based upon a residence's anticipated wastewater production, called the "loading rate". Loading rate projections are based on the expected maximum number of people that will reside in a house (usually considered to be two people per bedroom) with a maximum daily wastewater production per person of about 60-75 gallons per day. Exceeding the expected loading rate can seriously damage the OSS. The normal average monthly water use, as indicated by your water bills, should be no more than about two-thirds of the system's design loading rate. This will allow for occasional higher peak flows without damaging the OSS.

If your water bill indicates that you have been using excessive water, the source of the excess water could be either a leaking plumbing fixture (toilet or faucet). A check of all indoor plumbing fixtures (e.g., toilet tanks) can rule them out as the source.

Also, sometimes surface water or ground water leaking into the septic tank can overload a drainfield. Surface runoff should always be diverted away from the tank. Groundwater intrusion is a more difficult problem, suggesting tank or piping damage, and you should consult the system designer or installer or an OSS maintenance firm to help with diagnosis and corrective measures. Tank leaks are most common during winter months, when sites are wettest and sealing-mastics harden and fail. A test for the level of dissolved oxygen in the septic tank wastewater can often reveal the presence of water leaking into a tank. Ground and surface water contain more dissolved oxygen than does sewage.

**The OSS will not continue to operate properly at a loading rate higher than that for which it is designed. Be aware that the maximum designed daily loading rate for your system is \_\_\_\_\_ gallons per day.**

A common cause of periodic overloading is saving a number of wastewater generating activities for the weekend, when the laundry, dishwasher, bathtub and shower are used heavily. This overloads the system on weekends while a lower loading rate occurs during the weekdays. This high weekend water usage can cause the OSS alarm to go off if the system is equipped with a pump timer, or can literally "blow out" a mound, doing *permanent* damage, if it is not equipped with a properly adjusted timer.

These peak load spikes should be avoided by spreading wastewater-producing activities (e.g., clothes washing) evenly throughout the week. **In many cases, life styles may need to be adjusted to accommodate living within the limitations of an OSS.**

Remember that all OSSs have a limited capacity to treat and dispose of wastewater. Monitoring your family's water use habits will help you estimate how you are impacting your OSS. This will be especially useful if your home has no water meter. The following are some typical water use figures for various household activities. These figures will help you calculate your families OSS loading rate.

1. Showers typically use 25 gallons of water.
2. Clothes washing per load - 40 gallons. (Front loading washers and the new spray-rinse washers use much less.)
3. Dishwasher - 9 gallons per load.
4. Toilet flushing - 1.6 gallons-per flush-toilets are now the standard for new construction.
5. Garbage disposal - 2+ gallons per use.

## **WATER CONSERVATION**

It is important that you practice good water use habits to get the maximum life span from your OSS. Laundry washing should be spaced throughout the week and not all done on a single day. Wash only full loads of laundry or dishes. Low flow plumbing fixtures (toilets, faucet aerators, and showerheads) should be installed if not already present in the house. (Low flow fixtures will be present in homes built since 1993.) Water-conserving appliances, such as front-loading clothes washers or the new spray-rinse washers, should be chosen when replacing your appliances. Any water-generating activity should be thought of in terms of its impact on the OSS.

If your system has a pump timer, the alarm will sound should the design capacity of the system be exceeded (see TIMERS). If this happens repeatedly it can serve as a warning of excessive OSS loading.

**NOTE: You can obtain water conservation pamphlets from the Health Department, at (206) 296-4932.**

## **POWER FAILURES**

During a power failure, the wastewater cannot be pumped to the mound, and, therefore, will accumulate in the pump tank. You should begin severe water conservation measures as soon as the power goes out. All new systems using pumps are now equipped with timers. The timer controls the number of times the pump starts and, thereby, manages how much effluent goes into the mound in a 24 hour period. It ensures that the mound only gets as much effluent as it was designed to handle. A timer / pump system will take care of itself over time once the power comes back on, if it hasn't been overloaded with too much water (i.e. the water isn't backing up into the house). In order to let your pump system catch up, continue to conserve water for an additional day or more after power is restored. If the high water alarm sounds when the power comes back on, this indicates that wastewater has backed up into the emergency storage area of the pump tank. The alarm may be silenced manually and will shut itself off when the pump has pumped the excess wastewater out of the pump tank.

**If the system is not equipped with a timer** controlling the pump, the pump should be turned off at the pump's control panel or your circuit breaker box. Unless there is a timer, *if the power outage is extended (e.g., 6 hours or more), precautionary measures should be taken when the power returns, to avoid flooding the mound with excessive effluent.* In the absence of a timer, after the power returns, switch the pump on and let it run for no more than 5 minutes, then turn the pump off again. Repeat this manual switching not more frequently than every 6 hours until the pump switches off on its own. (Often you will be able to hear a hum when the pump is running, which stops when the pump shuts off. Also, if your pump control panel includes an hour meter, it will show time accumulating if the pump is running.) At this point, the normal, automatic cycling will once again be appropriate, and you may resume normal usage. If there has been little water use during the outage, the pump may automatically turn off during the first manual switching. In this case the switch can be left on.

# PERIODIC MAINTENANCE

It is essential that your OSS be inspected and maintained on a regular basis. This will catch most problems before they harm the system. Recent amendments to the state and county OSS regulations require periodic system monitoring (See “System Maintainer” in IMPORTANT NAMES AND PHONE NUMBERS, also see MOUND AND SITE INSPECTION, below.) Mound systems are relatively complex, susceptible to abuse, and costly to repair, and therefore must be monitored six months after installation, again six months later and annually thereafter. **The first monitoring of your system must be completed by \_\_\_\_\_ (date).**

## SEPTIC TANK PUMPING

Wastewater from all plumbing fixtures drains into the septic tank. Heavy solids settle to the bottom where bacterial action produces digested sludge and gases. Lighter solids that float, such as grease, oils and fats, rise to the top and form a scum layer. Sludge and solids that are not decomposed remain in the septic tank. These solids must be removed periodically by pumping the tank.

Septic tank pumping is only one aspect of OSS maintenance, but it is the first line of defense for your OSS and should not be neglected. The average pumping service interval recommended by the Health Department is 3-5 years. However, this interval depends on the septic tank’s size and the amount of solids and oil and grease put down the drain. A more frequent pumping schedule may be necessary depending on your family’s garbage disposal use and cooking and cleaning (especially dish washing) habits. **Inspecting the sludge and scum accumulation annually is the only sure way to determine whether a tank needs to be pumped.** As sludge and scum gradually accumulate, less and less room is available for the sewage coming into the tank. This results in the sewage passing through the tank more and more quickly, allowing less time for scum and solids to separate from the sewage before it leaves the tank, as “effluent”. Therefore the tank becomes decreasingly effective in protecting the mound from contaminants.

**The tank should be pumped before either the scum mat or sludge layer is twelve inches thick.** Once your characteristic sludge accumulation rate is known, pumping frequency can be adjusted accordingly. The Health Department can supply you with a brochure containing information on how to measure accumulated scum and sludge. Measuring the sludge and scum levels can be an awkward process. OSS maintainers or septic tank pumpers can do this for you if you prefer.

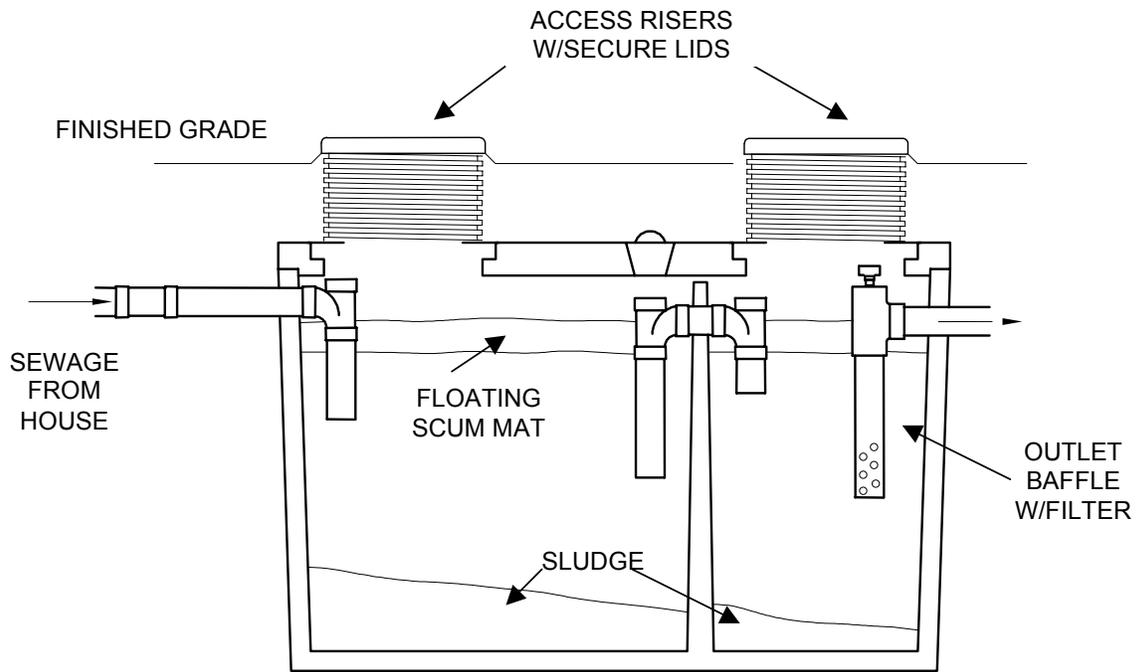
Knowing the location of your septic tank and pump tank will save time and money when it is time to have them checked or pumped. Current code requires that newly installed tanks have access lids at the surface. Also, you can locate your septic tank by referring to your OSS as-built drawing, attached to this manual. Once you have located the tank, contact the Health Department, at (206) 296-4932, for a list of septic tank pumpers currently certified to operate in King County. You may want to call several, because prices and details of the service provided may vary. For instance, some companies might insist on pumping the tank whether or not accumulated sludge and scum levels warrant it, and the thoroughness of the tank inspections may vary.

After the tank accesses are opened the pumper will note the odor and appearance of the wastewater inside. If the tank is working properly there should be a layer of scum on top and the wastewater should smell musty, like compost, not sour or nauseating. Before the pumper begins pumping the tank s/he will measure the scum and sludge layer thicknesses. Knowing the thicknesses you can judge the rate at which the solids have accumulated in the tank, and estimate the required pumping frequency. Required pumping frequency can change as household conditions, such as the number of residents, change.

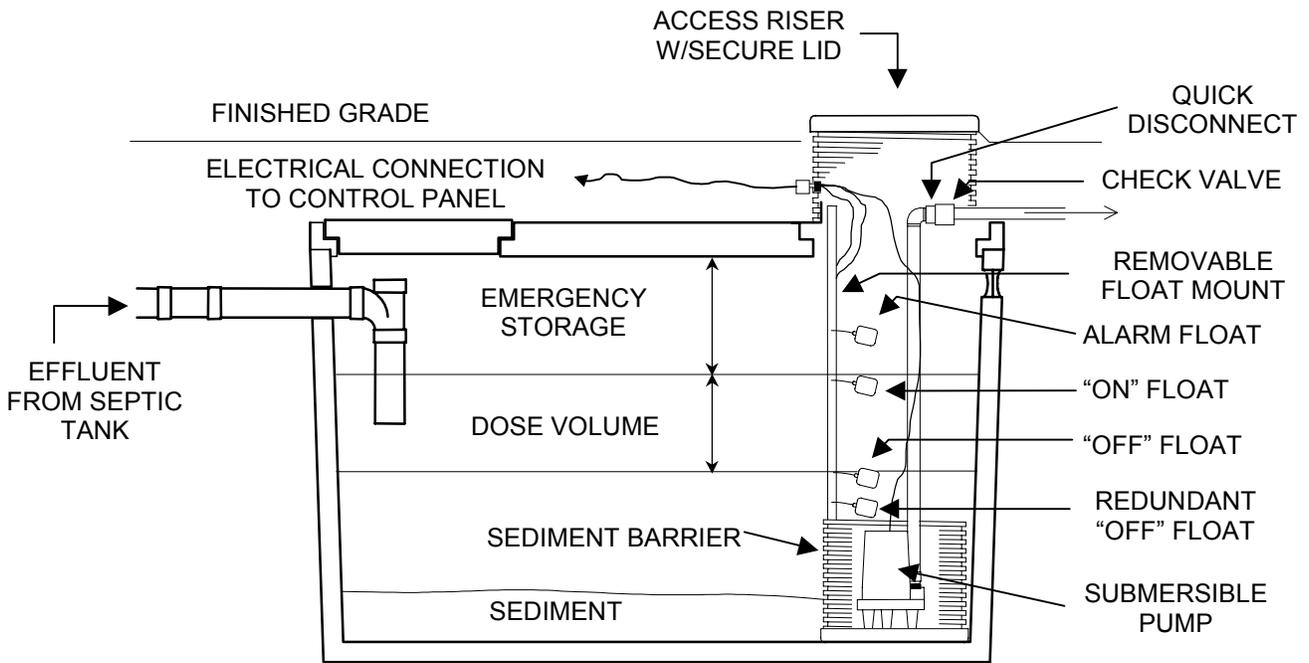
**When the septic tank is pumped, make sure that both septic tank compartments are pumped and that the pump tank is also pumped.** Upon completion of pumping, the pumper is to provide you with a report detailing the service. At a minimum this report is to include:

1. Name, address, and phone number of the pumping firm;
2. Name, address, and phone number of the owner/occupant of property serviced;
3. Date service performed;
4. Depth in inches of floating scum mat and sludge layer for both the septic tank and pump tank;
5. Type of tanks and number of compartments pumped;
6. Number of gallons pumped;
7. General tank condition observed;
8. Condition of baffles, noting whether the filter baffle was cleaned;
9. Description of any other service performed; and
10. Signature and certificate of competency number of person performing the work.

Failure to provide this report is a violation of King County Board of Health regulations.



**TYPICAL SEPTIC TANK**



**TYPICAL PUMP TANK**

## **TANK BAFFLES**

Septic tank baffles are devices within the septic tank that are essential to keep the solids in the tank, where they belong. Baffles also separate the floating scum layer from the liquid layer, promote settling of solids to the bottom of the tank, and allow only clarified liquid to enter the mound. There are three baffles located in a two compartment septic tank -- one on the inlet, where the sewage enters the tank; one on the wall dividing the tank into two compartments; and one on the outlet, where the effluent leaves the tank. All tank baffles should be inspected whenever the sludge and scum levels are measured. To thoroughly inspect the baffles it is sometimes necessary to pump the tank.

A broken outlet baffle can allow floating scum to leave the tank through its outlet, so that the tank retains no scum. This defeats the purpose of the tank and makes it appear that it does not require pumping. Sewage scum entering the mound can ruin it. Baffles must be replaced if they are in poor condition.

**The outlet baffle will probably contain a filter** to keep any solids larger than 1/8th inch from passing into the pump tank and being pumped into the mound. This filter will need periodic checking and cleaning. If the filter clogs, plumbing drains may drain slowly or sewage may backup in the house. The filter baffle should be checked, and generally cleaned, annually, e.g., as part of your annual mound system monitoring performed by your system maintainer, or the annual septic tank inspection, which you can do yourself. No water should be used inside the house while the filter is removed for checking and cleaning. This will minimize the escape of sludge and scum from the septic tank. Cleaning the filter generally involves simply removing it and hosing it off into the access for the inlet compartment of the tank.

**CAUTION: Some of the filter baffles when removed for cleaning may pass solids into the pump tank. If this is the case, the septic tank might need to be pumped down before removing the filter baffle for cleaning. Consult the manufacturer of your baffle, or your system maintainer, (see SPECIFICATIONS FOR ELECTRICAL AND MECHANICAL COMPONENTS).**

If there is not a screened baffle at the septic tank outlet there should be a screen around the pump, located in the pump tank. Make sure that the pump screen or the filter baffle is cleaned at the time of tank pumping. Any time that the tanks are checked, these screens should also be checked for blockage. The frequency of cleaning required will depend on user habits but is rarely greater than once a year.

## **PUMP TANK AND PUMP CONTROLS**

Wastewater leaving the septic tank is a liquid called "effluent". While it has received some treatment in the septic tank, it is still unpleasant smelling and contains disease organisms, organic wastes, and other pollutants. This effluent requires proper treatment and disposal; otherwise there can be significant environmental and public health problems.

In a mound system, a pump is used to convey the effluent for final treatment and disposal. The pump tank contains a sewage effluent pump, control floats, and a high water alarm. The control floats are set so that a specific volume of effluent is sent to the mound. This specific amount is referred to as a "dose". A timer generally determines the time between the doses. When the timer determines that the mound has been rested long enough, and the effluent in the pump tank rises to the level of the "on" float setting, the pump is activated and pumps the level of the effluent down until it reaches the "off" float setting.

As part of your OSS annual monitoring, your system maintainer will check to see that the float switches are clean and free in their movements and test the alarm float by lifting it.. The alarm should sound. If it does not and the circuit breaker is not tripped, servicing is required. The maintainer will also adjust the pump cycle to make sure that it meets the original specifications of the design. (See SPECIFICATIONS FOR ELECTRICAL AND MECHANICAL COMPONENTS for the original pumping dose and time.) If the pump cycle is too long (or residual pressure is too high), this may indicate that some orifices within the mound pressure lines are plugged. This can damage your mound by causing some portions of it to be

overloaded with effluent. A cleaning of the pressurized lines may be in order; consult your system maintainer for corrective action.

## **MOUND AND SITE INSPECTION**

Six months after installation, and annually beginning one year after installation, the mound (and the operation of the system in general) must be inspected by your system maintainer to determine its condition. This is required by a combination of state and county board of health regulations and is intended to save you money in the long run while protecting public health. More frequent inspections are sometimes desirable, e.g., if there is reason to expect that the mound is damaged or is being overloaded with effluent.

At a minimum the inspections must include:

1. Mound Area Evaluation for -
  - Indications of surfacing effluent or ponding in the monitoring standpipes
  - Appropriateness of vegetation, landscaping impacts, etc.
  - Absence of:
    - Heavy traffic
    - Inappropriate building
    - Impervious materials or surfaces
    - Abnormal settling or erosion
2. Mound Piping System Evaluation for –
  - Residual pressure at the distal ends (Confirm that pressures are as shown in this manual.)
  - Equal flows in each lateral
  - Need for cleaning (Clean laterals and orifices as needed.)
3. Pump System Evaluation for –
  - Pump run time per dose (Compare with designed time noted in this manual.)
  - Check timer settings, float switch operation and placement, and pipe condition
4. Alarm Test-
  - Assure proper operation
5. Septic Tank and Pump Tank Inspection for (homeowner may perform) –
  - Sludge and scum accumulation (i.e., need for pumping)
  - Clogging, damage, or improper placement of the outlet baffle filter (Clean as needed.)
  - Evidence of tank leakage
  - Risers and lids are at or above grade and lids are secured

As noted above, the maintainer will check liquid levels in the inspection ports, look for seepage around the toe of the mound, verify that the pump switches, alarm, and timer are set and operating correctly, and complete a number of other observations. If these procedures detect potential problems, additional tests might be needed. These tests sometimes include sampling and laboratory testing of effluent or mound materials. (See the APPENDIX A inspection form for a full list of the components of the periodic inspection.)

The system maintainer will be required to locate the mound inspection ports, which are the capped plastic standpipes within the mound. There should be at least two of these. Do not alter or remove these inspection ports, as they provide a “window” into the mound. One port, at the top of the mound, will extend down into the gravel bed, where the wastewater is initially discharged from the pump tank. The second port is usually located on a downslope section and extends to the native ground surface beneath the mound. If liquid within either of these pipes is observed to be ponding 4-6 inches or more continuously (i.e., for more than a day), or increases in depth over time, then there may be a problem with the functioning of the mound. The perimeter of the mound must be checked for sewage breakouts or erosion. The maintainer will check the downslope area of the mound for any signs of saturation or surfacing liquid.

In order for the mound to treat the wastewater, the wastewater must be able to move through it and pass into the ground for final treatment and disposal. Continuous ponding seen through the inspection ports is a sign that this process is not working. Corrective measures should be taken before the system actually fails. Replacement of a failed mound costs thousands of dollars. If you notice any potential problems, you should contact your OSS maintainer and the Health Department for a consultation.

Partial plugging of the mound's distribution piping may occur over time and is not unusual. This results in uneven distribution of effluent within the mound, overloading portions of the mound. This plugging can sometimes be detected by increased dosing times, i.e., the pump runs longer than its normal dose time; or the drawdown of effluent from the pump tank per dose is less than the designed drawdown. A more sensitive monitoring procedure is to check for increased residual pressure at the ends of the distribution pipes in the mound (see SPECIFICATIONS AND TROUBLESHOOTING). System monitoring will include a check for plugging. If evidence of plugging is found, the ends of the distribution laterals should be exposed and the pump activated to flush any solid material. If necessary, the pipe can be rodded. State guidelines require that the ends of all distribution lateral pipes be equipped with cleanout and monitoring ports with access to the ground's surface.

## MAINTENANCE LOG

The following log sheet will allow you to accurately document any service done to your mound system. You may wish to keep a log of the monitoring done by your system maintainer on this sheet as well. Keep this manual together with the reports you receive from your system maintainer and the company(s) that pump the septic tank. Having these documents available can save you hundreds or even thousands of dollars in maintenance, diagnosis, and repair costs over the life of your home. At the time of sale of your property these records will provide the buyer assurance that your OSS has been well maintained.

