

Clinton Wells, Septic Systems and YOU!

Clinton is a small town with forests, meadows and winding roads. It's a natural and beautiful place to live. It is also a town in which each household has its own private well and septic system. There is no central town well, reservoir or sewer system. With proper care (it's not difficult), each of us can help insure that our most valuable resource, our water, remains clean and safe.

An understanding of the issues, a few simple do's and don'ts, and regular maintenance will help us safeguard our water supply. First and most importantly, we must realize that many things we do affect the quality and quantity not only of our own water, but potentially that of our neighbors. Every Clinton resident is responsible for protecting our water.

Each of us needs to remember to use our water responsibly and conservatively. Everything we put down our drains or use on our lawns, gardens and pastures impacts our water. With thoughtful usage, regular testing and careful maintenance of our wells and septic systems, we all can be valued stewards of our community and its resources.

The Basics

- **Wells** – *Where our water comes from.* Before a house can be built in Clinton a well is drilled, tested and approved according to strict Department of Health guidelines. Health and property values are thus protected. Most Clinton wells tap into bedrock where water flows through fissures in the rock. Since many of these fissures are interconnected, the way each of us cares for our well can ultimately impact not only our own property, but everyone around us. Care and conservation of water is essential, today and in the future.
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- **Septic Systems** – *Where our water and wastes go.* Wastewater from our homes carries solids, grease, dirt, chemicals, bacteria and viruses and needs quite a bit of cleaning before it reaches our groundwater. Our septic systems do this job. A typical septic system is composed of a large concrete septic tank, a distribution box and a leaching field. In the septic tank the solids settle to the bottom (sludge), biological action "digests" the waste into a liquid, and the grease floats to the top (scum). Partially clarified liquid flows from the tank to the "D-box" where it is distributed to the trenches of the leaching field. These trenches allow the wastewater to seep slowly into the ground. The soil and microbes and bacteria living in the soil help to purify the waste water. Proper testing of septic systems is carefully controlled by both state and local regulations.

What you can do to protect our water

Conserve – Water Quantity

- Install water saving appliances – showers, faucets, toilets, washers etc. – to help conserve usage.
- Water gardens and lawns only when necessary. Water in early morning or early evening. One good soaking (30 minutes) is more beneficial than several short waterings.
- Have your well water tested for bacteria once a year, have a comprehensive water test done every three years. Call the Board of Health for a list of DEC certified testing labs

Prevent Non-point Source Pollution – Water Quality

- Use organic fertilizers, weed and insect controls when needed.
- Avoid pesticide use and chemical treatments of lawns and gardens. Excessively applied lawn chemicals will run off in a heavy rain and end up in streams and ponds, causing them to be overgrown with weeds or algae. Pesticide residues may dissolve in water and contaminate our groundwater, affecting the health of children, adults, pets, birds and fish.
- If you have farm animals, treat their wastes properly. Plant a buffer zone of vegetation (as wide as possible, 100 feet is ideal) between manure storage and any wetland resource area to reduce runoff volume and speed.
- Do not dispose of fertilizer, pesticides, cleaning chemicals, disinfectants, solvents, paints or paint thinner, waste oil or other toxic chemicals by pouring them on or burying them in the ground, or by pouring them down storm drains.
- Watch for Dutchess County's Household Hazardous Waste Collection Days.
- Remove aging/deteriorating fuel storage tanks.

Maintain Your Septic System

- Have your septic system pumped regularly; every 2 to 3 years (or as needed) is recommended if the system is in good working order. Contact the Board of Health for licensed septage haulers in our area.
- Keep records of septic system maintenance, inspection and repairs.
- Make a map of the location of your septic system components and be sure family members are aware of what is underground. Never drive or park on any part of your system. Don't plant shrubs or trees over your system; roots may clog or damage your system.
- Divert roof drains and surface water run-off away from your septic system.
- Practice water conservation. Repair drips and leaks. Use water-saving showers, toilets and faucets.
- Avoid using a garbage disposal. The board of Health strongly discourages their use.
- Don't use commercial septic tank cleaning products. At best these products are a harmless waste of money, at worst they may harm your septic system. They are not an alternative for regular maintenance, which is cheaper in the long run.
- Never pour pesticides, cleaning chemicals, disinfectants, undiluted chlorine bleach, solvents, paints or paint thinner, waste oil, gasoline, antifreeze or other toxic materials down toilets or sinks. They kill the natural biological organisms that break down the solids. This causes the solids to build up and the wastes not to be treated completely. Improperly treated wastewater can clog your leaching field and cause it to fail. It can also enter and contaminate nearby water resources.
- Do not pour grease or cooking oil down the drain. It will clog the soil and the leaching system.
- Do not dispose of non-biodegradable items such as disposable diapers and plastics down the toilet. They do not decompose.
- Be alert to signs of a failing system such as the presence of wet areas above the leaching field and backing up of wastewater following periods of heavy water use.
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If questions arise regarding a well or septic system, please contact the Dutchess County Health Department at 845-486-3400.

This informational brochure was used, with permission, from a similar brochure developed by the Town of Sherborn, Massachusetts.