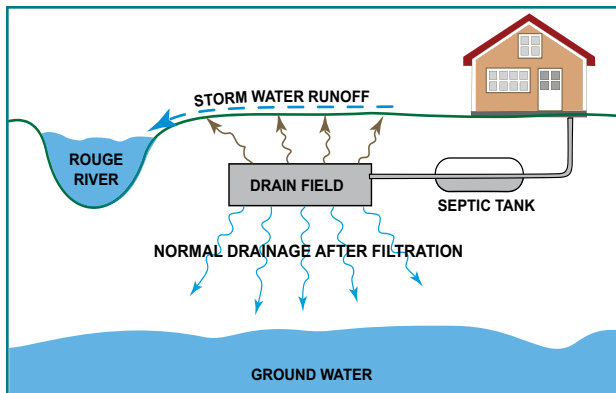


# FACT SHEET

GUIDE NO. 8

DOES MY SEPTIC SYSTEM AFFECT THE ROUGE RIVER?



*Malfunctioning septic fields may cause harmful bacteria to enter the Rouge River.*

Does your household use a septic system for wastewater treatment? If so, it has the potential to negatively affect water quality in the Rouge River Watershed if not maintained properly.

The Rouge River Watershed is all the land area and waterways that drain into the Rouge River. So if your septic system isn't correctly located, adequately designed, carefully installed and properly managed, it may be contributing to pollution in the Rouge River, which affects everybody!

Septic systems are wastewater treatment systems that use septic tanks and drain fields to dispose of sewage in the soil. The tank receives untreated household waste, bacteria break down the solid material and the drain field distributes the remaining liquid from the septic tank to the surrounding soil. The soil then acts as the final filter for wastewater treatment. A septic system failure can cause serious problems including sewage backup, human and animal illness, contaminated water supplies, and costly repair bills!

### Signs of a Malfunctioning System:

- Toilet running sluggish.
- Sewer odors in the house.
- Sponginess around the septic tank or field area and surfacing raw sewage.

### Tips for Keeping your System Working Properly:

- Commercial septic tank additives usually do not help and may hurt your system in the long run.
- The drain field should only be covered with grass; don't plant trees or shrubs - their roots are too long. Keep the grass cut to around 2-3 inches. The cut grass helps remove nutrients from the field and increases evaporation.
- Keep kitchen garbage disposal use at a minimum, and don't put hazardous chemicals down the drain.
- NEVER use your toilet like a trash can! Coffee grinds, kitty litter, paper towels, tampons, dental floss, cigarette butts, pesticides, paints, oils, etc., can overtax or destroy the beneficial bacteria in your system and pollute the water.
- Toxic gases are produced in the tank and are very dangerous, so don't ever go down into the tank. Even lifting the lid to look inside can be dangerous.
- Learn the location of your septic tank. Keep a maintenance record of the tank and drain field.
- If you are having problems such as sewage backup, slow drains, unpleasant odors or visible liquid on the ground by the system, immediately contact your county health department. Wayne County Health Department can be reached at 734-727-7000.