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**The top things you can do to protect your well and septic**

By Irene Shonle, Director CSU Extension in Gilpin County

If you have a well and septic system, you may not have thought about it this way, but you are actually your own private utility. You are in charge of providing your own water, ensuring its quality, and taking care of the sewage disposal. Read below for tips on helping you keep your water and wastewater disposal systems in top shape.

Septic system top tips

1. Pump your septic tank every 3-5 years, depending on the size of your family (pump more often with more people). Not pumping is one of the leading causes of leach field failure – it is far cheaper to pump regularly than to replace your leach field!
2. Limit the volume of water going through the septic system to reduce strain and the potential for failure. Conserve water whenever possible (for tips go here: www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/consumer/09952.html) and fix leaks. Try to space out laundry loads, showers, and dishwashing so that a lot of water does not enter the tank at one time.
3. Be conscious of what goes down your drain. Do not put bleach, paint, grease, drain cleaners, extra medicines or feminine products down the drain. Check that your toilet paper is septic-safe, and do not dispose of wipes or other solids by flushing them in the toilet. There is also some evidence that the brine from water softeners can be hard on septic system bacteria; check with the provider on how to minimize problems.
4. Garbage disposals create extra work for septic systems; use a drain strainer in the sink to catch food instead and toss the debris in the garbage.
5. Keep trees and shrubs at least 20' back from the leach field so the roots don't damage the pipes. Grasses and wildflowers are encouraged, but never water the leach field.

Well top tips

1. Test your well annually for bacteria. Test at least once for a water quality baseline and for any heavy metal contaminants that may be present in our mineral-rich soils.
2. Check that your well has a 'sanitary seal' vs. a looser cap, which can allow contaminants in.
3. Ensure that water drains away from the well head.
4. Keep pesticides/other chemicals and manure/livestock at least 100' away from the wellhead.

To learn more, come to the **FREE Well and Septic class on March 11** at 6:30pm at the Gilpin County Public Health Office (101 Norton Drive). We will go into more detail on how to care for your well and septic, Gilpin County regulations, water testing, and well water rights. Hope to see you there!

The CSU Gilpin County Extension Office is located at the Exhibit Barn, 230 Norton Drive, Black Hawk, CO 80422, 303-582-9106, www.extension.colostate.edu/gilpin. Colorado State University Extension provides unbiased, research-based information about, horticulture, natural resources, and 4-H youth development. Colorado State University Extension is dedicated to serving all people on an equal and nondiscriminatory basis.