

Cottonwood Creek Septic Smart

July 2013

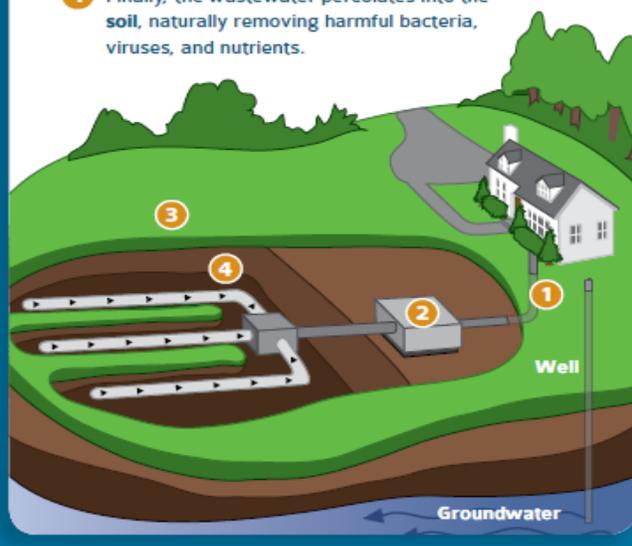
Did you know that almost all of the homes along Cottonwood Creek have septic systems? Yours may be one of them. Septic systems can pollute the environment and put your family's health at risk if it is not being maintained properly and regularly. In fact, Cottonwood Creek is currently listed by the State of Alaska as polluted with excess fecal coliform bacteria – an indicator of possible human sewage pollution.



How does a septic system work?

This is a simplified overview of how a septic system works.

- 1 All water runs out of your house from one main **drainage pipe** into a septic tank.
- 2 The **septic tank** is a buried, water-tight container usually made of concrete, fiberglass or polyethylene. Its job is to hold the wastewater long enough to allow solids to settle down to the bottom (forming sludge), while the oil and grease floats to the top (as scum). Compartments and a T-shaped outlet prevent the sludge and scum from leaving the tank and traveling into the drainfield area.
- 3 The liquid wastewater then exits the tank into the **drainfield**. If the drainfield is overloaded with too much liquid, it will flood, causing sewage to flow to the ground surface or create backups in toilets and sinks.
- 4 Finally, the wastewater percolates into the **soil**, naturally removing harmful bacteria, viruses, and nutrients.



To help address this problem, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) is teaming up with the Mat-Su Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) over the next year on a project focused on septic systems in the Cottonwood Creek watershed.

This project will work with homeowners, local engineers, and septic system pumping services to develop a pumping co-operative to share costs where one street with several home septic systems can be inspected/serviced at once at reduced costs. The project will also provide useful information for homeowners with septic systems on ways to reduce the potential for polluting the environment.

More information is coming later this summer but if you and your neighbors are interested in this project and saving money while maintaining your septic system, please contact Laura Eldred, ADEC, 376-1855 or email laura.eldred@alaska.gov.

Graphic courtesy of the Environmental Protection Agency.