

Treat it Right



**Information for Homeowners on
Septic System Operation and
Maintenance**

Your Onsite Wastewater Treatment System

*Preserve the life and function of your septic system
by giving it the care and maintenance it needs.*

How a Septic System Works

In a properly operating septic system, the solid material in the sewage is settled out in a septic tank and stored until removal by pumping. The liquid effluent from the tank is still sewage, has a strong odor, and is high in disease-causing organisms. The effluent is passed from the tank to your drainfield where it is absorbed into the ground in a controlled manner and treated by the natural microbes in the soil.



When Bad Things Happen

Septic
System
Failure:



Tank

- Is more costly than regular maintenance
- Presents a health hazard to you, your family, and your neighbors
- Can cause pollution of wells, lakes, and streams
- Is a nuisance!

Common Causes of System Failure:

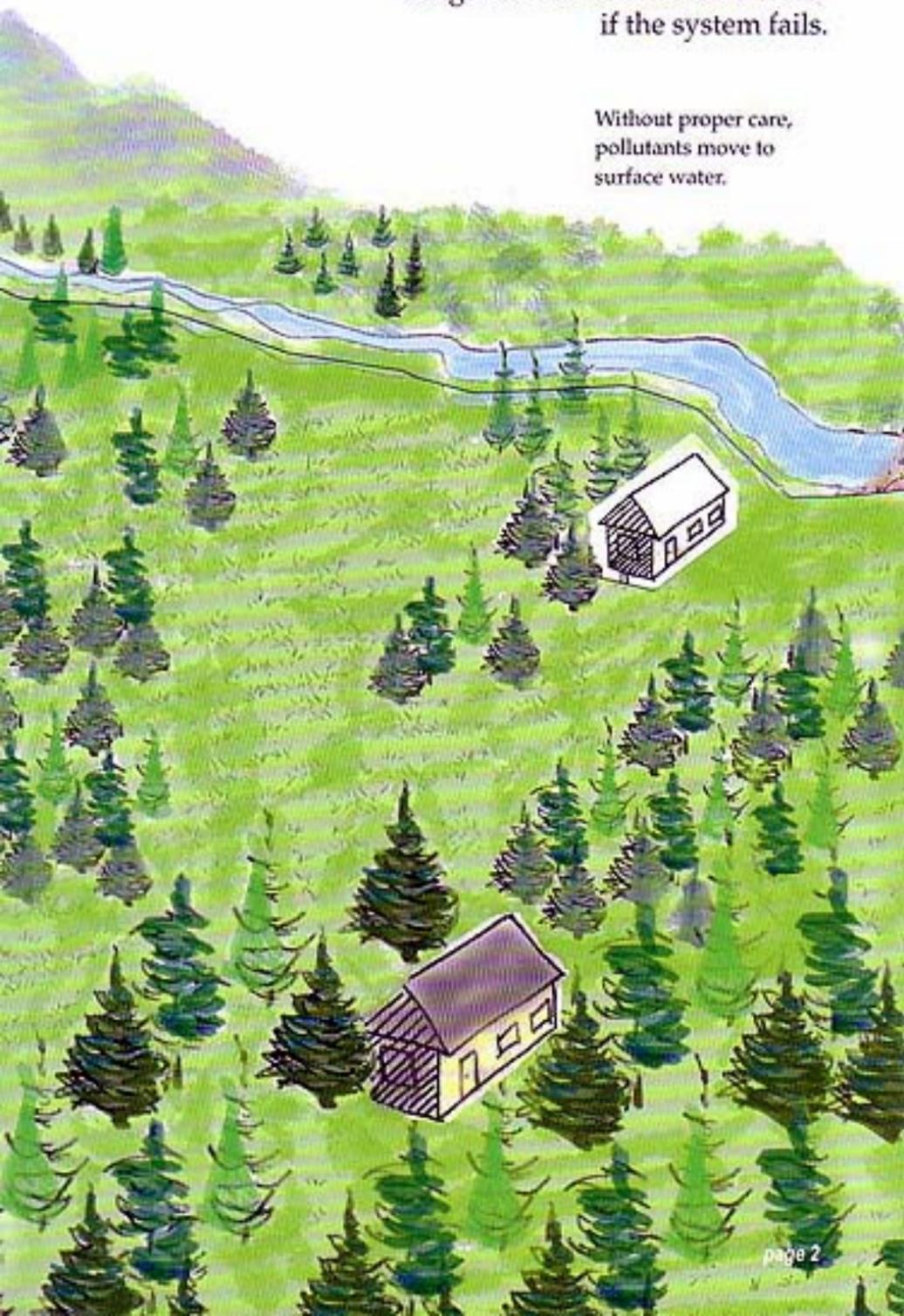
- Tank gets too full of solids
- Solids that have not properly settled clog drain lines
- Overloading of the system – too much water over a short time
- Chemicals that disrupt the biological balance of the system
- Drain lines are crushed and no longer function
- Roots from trees or bushes clog the drain lines
- Drainfield is exposed by erosion

To Prevent System Failure...

- A person trained in wastewater inspection should periodically inspect the system and make recommendations to fix it if necessary.
- The homeowner should properly maintain the system.
- The system should be periodically pumped.

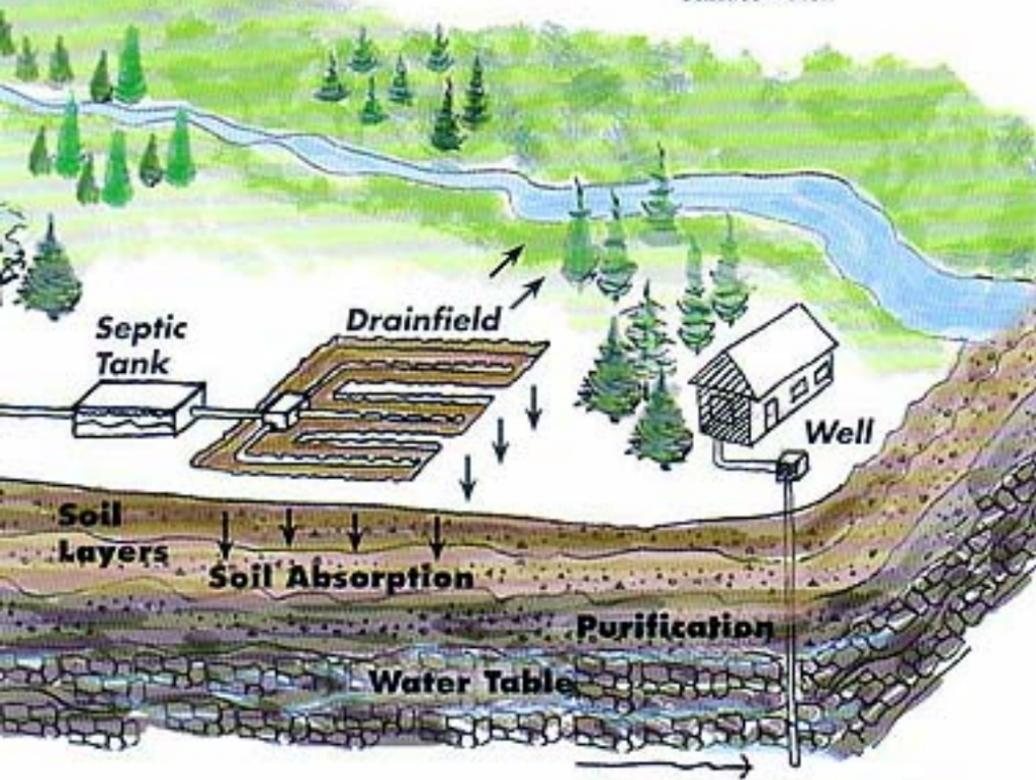
Harmful pollutants can find their way into
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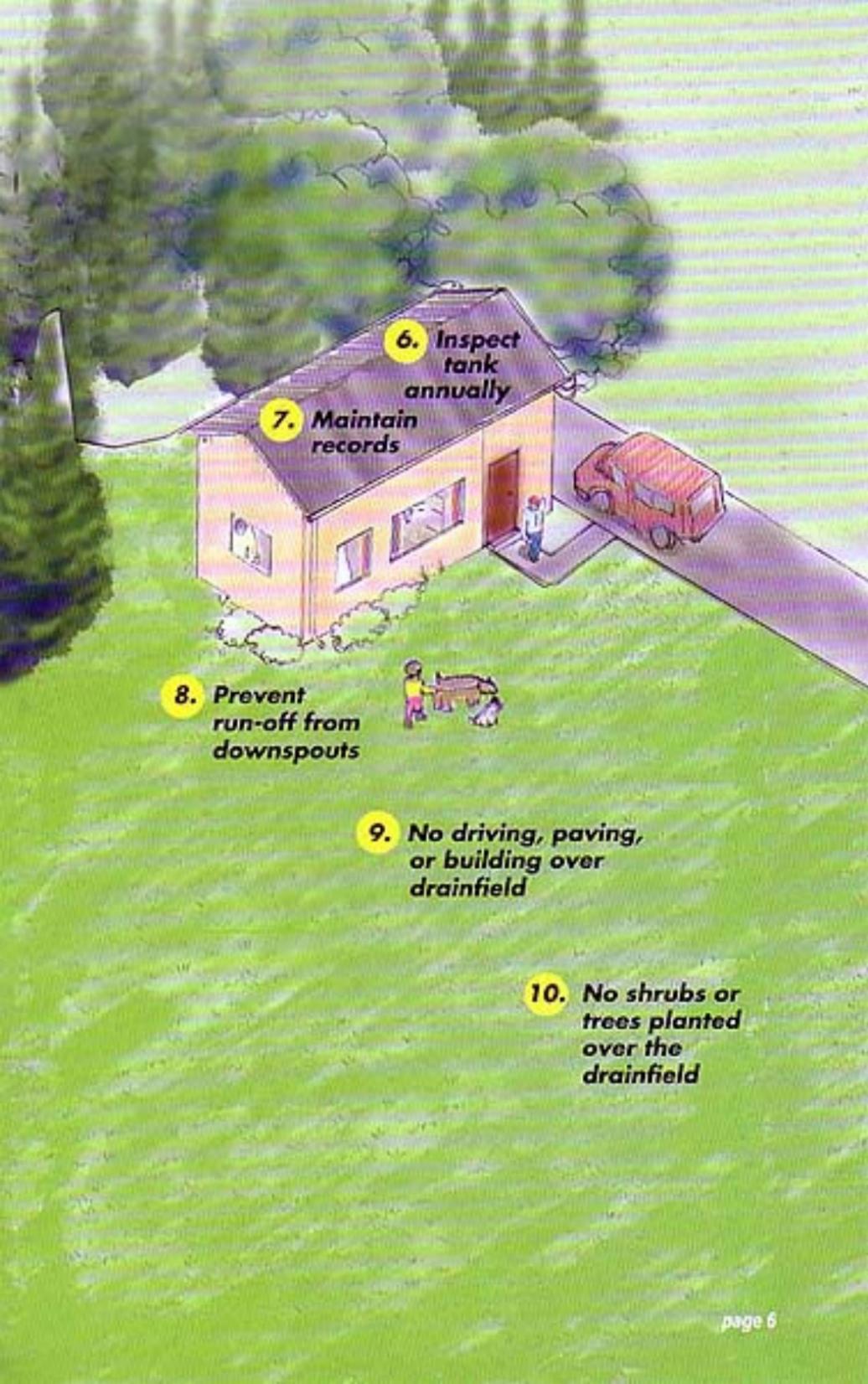
Without proper care, pollutants move to groundwater, and can affect the neighbor's well.

Water pollution can occur for many reasons including:

- Use of toxic chemicals in the home that enter the septic system
- Untreated sewage released into the environment because of system failure

Top Ten Septic Maintenance Tips

- 1. Don't wait for the system to fail** before having the septic tank pumped. By this point, the drainfield has likely been damaged. In some cases, a new system must be constructed.
 - 2. Have the septic tank pumped** about every three to five years, depending upon tank size and full-time household size and use. *(see chart on page 8).*
 - 3. Conserve water** and reduce wasteflow into the septic tank.
 - 4. Don't dump pharmaceuticals or household chemicals** down the toilet or sink, because this can hurt sewage breakdown, damage the system, and pollute ground or surface water. Additives that are advertised to help the system are not necessary and can cause damage to the system.
 - 5. Do not use the toilet or sink** to dispose of bulky, slowly decomposing wastes (e.g., oil, grease, etc.).
 - 6. Examine the septic tank, pipes, valves, and drainage field** annually to see if there is any obvious damage. Have the system periodically inspected by a certified inspector, at a minimum at time of property sale.
 - 7. Maintain accurate records** of the system: design, installation, location, inspections, pump outs, malfunction, and repairs.
 - 8. Prevent run-off** from downspouts, sump pumps, and paved surfaces from getting into the septic tank or saturating the drainfield.
 - 9. Do not drive, pave, or build** on top of a septic system. Drainfield pipes can shift or be crushed, and the soil can be compacted. Damage of this sort compromises the treatment process, and can result in untreated sewage ponding on your lawn.
 - 10. Do not plant trees and shrubs** over or near the tank or drainfield, because roots can clog the system and prevent even dispersal of the effluent.
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An illustration of a house with a brown roof and orange walls. A red septic tank is connected to a drainfield in the yard. A person is standing near the tank. The background shows green trees and a grassy lawn.

6. Inspect tank annually

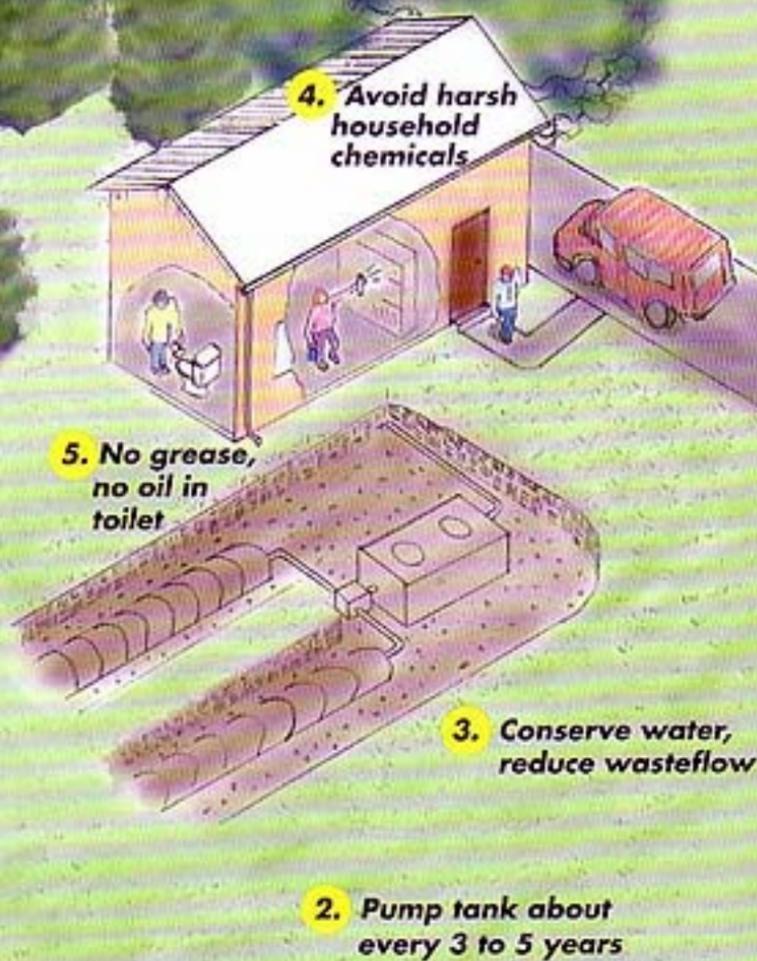
7. Maintain records

8. Prevent run-off from downspouts



9. No driving, paving, or building over drainfield

10. No shrubs or trees planted over the drainfield



1. Don't wait for the system to fail!

Inspection and Pumping are Important

To work properly, the septic tank should be pumped periodically. Doing so removes the sludge and scum retained in the tank, and reduces clogging of the drainfield. Garbage disposals are not recommended, however if used, more frequent pumping is needed. Biological and chemical septic tank additives are not necessary, nor do they eliminate the need for pumping.

Pumping Frequency						
Tank Size	1 person	2 people	3 people	4 people	5 people	6 people
1,000 gallon	6 yrs	6 yrs	4 yrs	3 yrs	2 yrs	2 yrs
1,250 gallon	8 yrs	8 yrs	5 yrs	3 yrs	3 yrs	3 yrs
1,500 gallon	9 yrs	9 yrs	6 yrs	4 yrs	3 yrs	3 yrs

Locate Your Septic Tank and Drainfield

- Check with permitting agency or in property purchase records for as-built drawing
- Get a copy of the permit
- Probe with metal poker for septic tank
Hint: Follow sewage line from house.
- Look for drainfield
Hints: Look for slight depression or mounding of the ground
Look for stripes in lawn or differences in vegetation cover
- Contact county sanitarian or septic professional for help

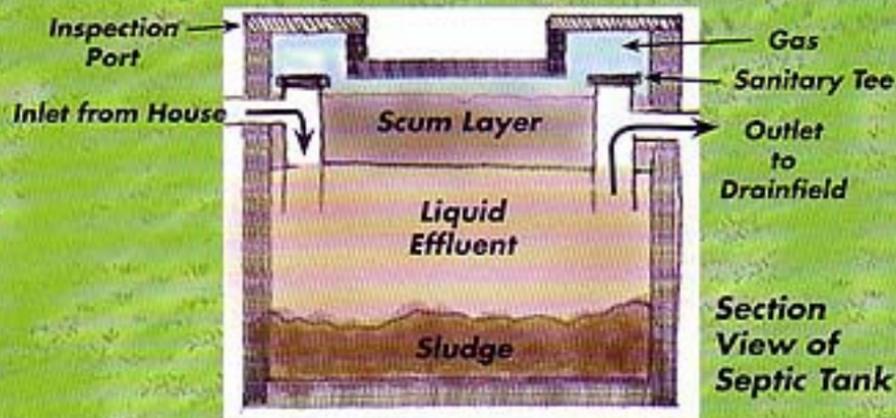
Signs of possible system failure

- Wetness or pooled water over drainfield
- Lush growth over drainfield (greener or brown grass over drain lines is normal)
- Backup of sewage inside house

Don't be a chump — Get it pumped!

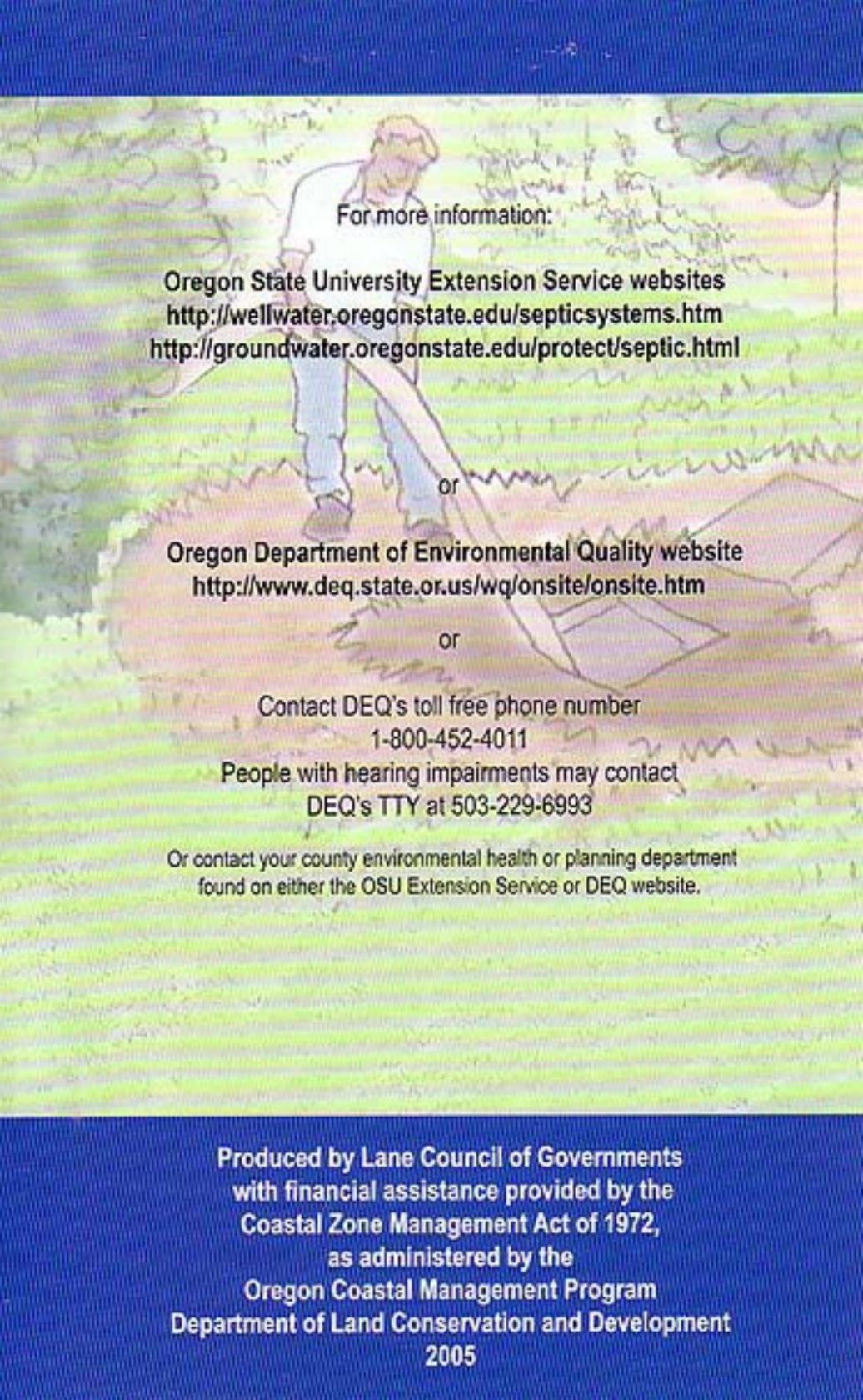


Don't be a chump — Get it pumped!



If a system fails:

- Do not place more soil over the drainfield.
- Do not pipe the sewage to the road ditch, storm sewer, stream, or a farm drain tile; doing so pollutes the water and creates a health hazard.
- Contact a licensed installer and your local health department or Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Office.

An illustration of a person in a white shirt and blue pants digging a trench in a yard. The background shows green grass, trees, and a house. The text is overlaid on the illustration.

For more information:

Oregon State University Extension Service websites

<http://wellwater.oregonstate.edu/septicsystems.htm>

<http://groundwater.oregonstate.edu/protect/septic.html>

or

Oregon Department of Environmental Quality website

<http://www.deq.state.or.us/wq/onsite/onsite.htm>

or

Contact DEQ's toll free phone number

1-800-452-4011

People with hearing impairments may contact

DEQ's TTY at 503-229-6993

**Or contact your county environmental health or planning department
found on either the OSU Extension Service or DEQ website.**

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