

Is Your Home Septic System Helping Restore The Chester River?



If you are one of over 100 families in Kent and Queen Anne's counties who have upgraded their home septic system with financial assistance from the state, then you are well on your way to helping restore the Chester River. The Chester River Association heartily applauds your action.

If you are not among those families, please read on. Your system is hurting the river.

Bacteria and Nitrogen

A properly maintained conventional septic system (see box at right), removes bacteria from sewage, which is good. But such a system does not remove nitrogen – a step that is essential to restoring the river's health.

Nitrogen is a nutrient in sewage that flows in groundwater into our Chester. There, unfortunately, it contributes to algal growth, which depletes oxygen. Depleted oxygen leads to fish kills and loss of underwater grasses, depriving waterfowl, fish and crabs of habitat.

Old, conventional septic systems were not designed to remove nitrogen. Thus, your system, unless it has been upgraded, is contributing a nutrient that harms the river and the creatures that live there.

And the contribution is significant: It is estimated that 10 percent of all nitrogen entering the Chester comes from home septic.

What Can You Do?

As part of Maryland's efforts to restore the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, the state Department of the Environment established the Bay Restoration Fund, which offers financial grants to homeowners who want to upgrade their septic systems so that they will remove most nitrogen.

Those upgrades, called Best Available Technology (BAT) Biological Nutrient Removal (BNR) systems, can reduce your septic nutrient output by an estimated 60 percent.

So what can you do? You can apply for an upgrade with state financial assistance through the Bay Restoration Fund. If the state approves your application, it will pay for a nitrogen-removal upgrade to your system (several thousand dollars or more) as well as the first five years of maintenance.

The Bay Restoration Fund, created by our "flush tax" dollars, aims to reduce nitrogen loads in Maryland waterways by financing three major programs: septic system upgrades, cover crops for farmers and upgrades to large wastewater treatment plants.

The Chester River Association strongly supports home septic upgrades. If enough of us who live in the watershed begin to upgrade we can bring back the river's health. Please apply.

Who To Call

For information on applying for home septic upgrades:

- In Kent, call John Beskid, Director of Environmental Health, Kent County Health Dept., 410-778-2142. Email: jbeskid@dnhm.state.md.us
- In Queen Anne's, call John Boris, at MDE, 1-800-633-6101. Email: JBoris@mde.state.md.us
- Also, Jennifer Hicks, Septic Specialist, Chester River Association, 410-810-7556. Email: jhicks@chesterriverassociation.org
- Also, visit the MDE web site at www.mde.state.md.us/Water/CBWRF/index.asp

Here are some tips for maintaining your system:

- Have your septic tank pumped out every 2-5 years. This will keep the drain field open and add years to the system's life, saving you money and making you a better steward of the river's health.
- Keep water flow to a minimum by installing water-saver shower heads and by running clothes washers and dishwashers fully loaded. Fix leaky faucets and running toilets immediately.
- Do not use a garbage disposal. This will add solids that may clog the system and cause it to fail prematurely, costing you money.
- Never put cigarette butts, sanitary supplies, paint, chemicals, cooking oil, old medicines, paper towels or any tissue but toilet paper into your toilets. These can harm the septic system.
- Do not plant shrubs or trees over your system. Do not park or drive heavy vehicles over it. Do not allow standing water to collect over it or drain into it.



The Chester River Association is an advocate for the health of the Chester River and the living resources it supports. CRA strives to promote stewardship of the river – its forests, marshes, fields, creeks, and streams – as well as an understanding of the river's place in the economic and cultural life of our communities. In its efforts to improve water quality, educate the public and facilitate resolution of river-related issues, CRA is a voice for the Chester River.

Visit us at our Chestertown office or learn more about CRA and our Chester Riverkeeper program at our new website, www.chesterriverassociation.org
Source: Maryland Department of Environment

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TRADITIONAL SEPTIC SYSTEM

