

Introduction to London Grove Township's On-lot Sewage Management Program

Most homes in London Grove Township are served by an on-lot sewage system, often called a septic system or, in some cases, a cesspool. While the particular designs may vary, all have one thing in common: regular maintenance is essential to keep the system working properly. On-lot sewage systems simply aren't meant to work in the long term without some maintenance, much like your car isn't meant to run forever without regular oil changes. By maintaining your sewage system correctly you will avoid unnecessary groundwater pollution, minimize health risks from polluted water and sewage discharges to the ground surface, and save yourself money in the long run by helping to avoid installing a new (and very expensive) sewage system.

Background

Many of us take our on-lot sewage systems for granted – as long as wastewater goes down the drain without a problem, we don't think much about keeping on top of sewage system maintenance. Why bother? As the saying goes, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it", right? Well, it turns out that this is right, assuming you like polluted groundwater, health hazards, and having really expensive repairs that could have been avoided!

Obviously, none of us want these things to happen, but this is exactly what occurs over the long run when we don't maintain sewage systems. It may take many years for a problem to become evident to a homeowner, such as having a wet area above your sewage system, but by the time this happens the sewage system may be beyond repair and has likely been polluting our groundwater for some time. For this reason, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (and their counterparts in many other states) have been strongly encouraging municipalities to adopt ordinances that provide for regular sewage system maintenance. The programs that result from such an ordinance are typically called on-lot sewage management programs. London Grove's on-lot sewage management program is the result of a commitment in the Township's Official Sewage Facilities Plan (often called an Act 537 Plan), as approved by the Department of Environmental Protection.

The intent of the London Grove program is to require everyone who owns a building served by an on-lot system to maintain that system properly, and thereby minimize groundwater pollution and environmental health hazards that result from a malfunctioning sewage system. Although participation is not optional, it is hoped that once residents understand that the program consists of common-sense activities that will benefit each homeowner as well as our shared environment, there will be little or no need to enforce participation requirements. The program is designed to protect our water supplies and quality of life; it is not intended to be a source of difficulty between London Grove and its residents.

Scope of the Program

If you have a vacant property or one that is connected to a public sewage system, this program does not apply to you. If you have an on-lot sewage system on your property, the following general requirements will apply:

- Pumping – every on-lot system must be pumped out by a Chester County Health Department licensed sewage pumper at least every three years.
- Operation – putting substances down the drain that may damage your system and the environment is prohibited.
- Maintenance – each homeowner must maintain their system to help avoid malfunctions. In addition to the pumping requirement noted above, this includes diverting surface water away from the system and other activities as may be needed to avoid or manage a malfunction.

These are generally simple, common-sense measures that will require minimal time and expense on the part of each homeowner. Many residents are already practicing good sewage system maintenance, while others may not fully understand that doing so is a win/win for both a homeowner and our environment. To help all residents gain a better understanding of the value and need for on-lot sewage system maintenance, the Township has prepared a number of other informational articles to explain sewage systems, maintenance, and the on-lot management program in more detail. Please take the time to read these articles carefully, and thank you for doing your part to help protect our health, environment and groundwater.