

## The Ride is Smooth When You're Septic Smart!

Last week I watched ceremoniously as my car's odometer rolled to a new era of 100,000 miles. Happy Birthday, Storm! (Yes, I named my car.) We have spent more than half of her road miles together and from day one I have done all I can to maintain and protect this valuable investment. I rely on my car almost daily, in daylight and darkness, through rain, fog, and snow (and then some!) on my commuting journeys to and from Geauga County. Most of us will agree that if our car is running smoothly, our life is running smoothly... or at least we're getting where we need to be! In the long run, we know it pays to be diligent with recommended preventative maintenance to extend the life of our vehicle and protect our investment.

Unfortunately this logical viewpoint is not so readily embraced when we switch gears, so to speak, to our household sewage treatment systems. Investments indeed, these systems are very costly to install and are becoming more so with increasing technology and treatment efficiency. Yet our septic system may be the most overlooked and undervalued utility in our home. Just like our vehicle, we rely on our septic daily (and nightly!), expecting it to smoothly run and safely treat the wastewater generated from our home. We drive our car off the dealer lot with full awareness of the expenses that lie ahead. But paying to maintain our septic system? We come to a screeching halt.

### **Lake Erie: Don't Waste It!**

Geauga Soil and Water Conservation District continues to encourage residents to look closely at ways to reduce the amount of waste - whether from animals, households, yards, pets, and people - from entering our waterways. *Lake Erie: Don't Waste It!* remains a resounding stormwater message throughout our programs and projects. While recent progress has been made in the application and management of Ohio's agricultural animal waste, let's not neglect, but rather accept our responsibility for the maintenance of our septic systems and the treatment of our own waste.

### **Keep Our Waste Out of Our Water**

With one-fourth of U.S. homes using septic systems, more than 4 billion gallons of wastewater are dispersed below the ground's surface every day. Sewage is a complex mixture and can contain many types of contaminants. Well designed and maintained systems effectively eliminate most human health or environmental threats posed by household wastewater. However, malfunctioning systems can discharge bacteria, viruses, nitrogen, and other pollutants, contaminating nearby surface and groundwater resources. According to the 2012 Clean Watersheds Needs Survey, approximately 31% of all household sewage treatment systems throughout the state of Ohio are experiencing some degree of failure. Furthermore, the most common reason for early failure is improper maintenance by homeowners and the most commonly identified impact is surface water contamination. The problems of our failing septic systems don't stop at the property lines, and sewage can threaten the health of our families, neighbors, and communities.

### **Get Pumped!**

The good news is that we are not up a creek without a paddle! In fact, we all have a paddle and it's called routine maintenance. Proper operation and maintenance of your septic system can have a significant impact on how well it works and how long it lasts. By now, the reasons to maintain your system should be much clearer than your septic sludge! It saves you thousands of dollars in the long run, adds longevity to the life of your system, protects your investment and your property value, keeps your family healthy and our water clean. Just like car care, septic system maintenance isn't complicated and stays relatively inexpensive if done on a regular basis. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has designated the last full week of September each year as *SepticSmart Week*. This national initiative showcases the importance of proper care and maintenance of our home sewage treatment systems and serves as a helpful reminder to schedule service. Plenty of information and resources explaining how to maintain your septic system can be found on their website - [www.epa.gov/septicmart](http://www.epa.gov/septicmart).

### **The Road Ahead**

The most important step to jump-start your septic tank care is to have it inspected and pumped. Just like changing your car's oil every 3,000 miles, household septic tanks should typically be inspected and pumped at least every three years. And just like your vehicle records, keep records of your septic system inspections and maintenance. As a homeowner/septic system owner, grab the wheel of responsibility and accept that clean water is everyone's "duty"! You'll have the peace of mind in knowing that whatever the road ahead might bring, you came prepared and brought a paddle.