

You may be a reflection of your septic tank

By Dave Kellam

If your home has a properly maintained septic system and you are looking for a job, here is a little tip to pad your resume: add "wastewater treatment plant manager" to your list of job experiences. It is an accurate description, and it tells your future employer that you are a smart, model citizen who is fiscally responsible.

Your future boss will know you must be smart because you have a working septic system. He/she will know you have never flushed stuff - like grease, cigarette butts, cat litter, tampon applicators, paint and even expired pharmaceuticals (a bottle of antibiotics can kill the good bacteria in your tank)-down the toilet that has harmed your system. You also would know that adding a garbage disposal in your old home would be a bad idea, because your system was not built to handle the extra-chunky waste. Instead, you compost.

Finally, your soon-to-be boss knows that you would never abuse the leach field by either driving over it or planting a tree on top of it.

You will probably get your dream job because your demonstrated commitment to septic system maintenance proves that you are a model citizen. By preventing a septic system failure, you have saved your neighborhood rivers, lakes and streams from a dose of sewage, which makes for unhealthy swimming conditions and poor water quality. Every boss wants an employee who cares about the environment and the community.

Finally, properly maintaining your septic system shows that you make wise financial decisions. You know that by paying a little bit for a yearly inspection and for a pump-out every three to five years, you significantly prolong the life of your septic system. Because a new system will cost between \$8,000 and \$20,000, your ounce of prevention will save a ton of money and hassle in the future.

If you want to add "septic system inspector" to your resume, too, the staff at the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services - Subsurface Systems Bureau can give you some do-it-yourself advice at 271-3501. To find a qualified septic system inspector or pumper, try Granite State Designers and Installers, New Hampshire's Association of Septic System Professionals, at 228-1231.

Because septic systems are buried and out of sight, it is easy to take them for granted. But the consequences of ignoring them are expensive and messy. Taking care of your septic system might not ensure a successful career, but it will protect your home, your investment and the environment.

Dave Kellam is a principal planner for the New Hampshire Estuaries Project. This is an educational column initiated by the New Hampshire Estuaries Project about coastal watershed issues. The New Hampshire Estuaries Project is a collaborative program involving governmental agencies, universities, nonprofit organizations, businesses and the public to protect, enhance and monitor the environmental quality of the state's coastal bays and rivers. Go to www.nh.gov/nhep for more information.

Published in the Portsmouth Herald on 5/2/2005