

# LITTLE COLORADO SANITARY DISTRICT

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## PROPER OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF A SOLIDS SEPARATOR TANK CONTRIBUTE TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) and Apache County Health Department (ACHD) are concerned about the potential for failure of sewage processing facilities in the Greer vicinity. ADEQ and ACHD join Little Colorado Sanitary District (the District) in providing customers this information on solids separation tank operation and maintenance.

### Solids Separation Tank Basics

Wastewater from toilets, sinks, showers and other drains flows to an underground, water-tight holding tank, where solids and liquids separate. Heavier solid material sinks, forming a *sludge* layer in the bottom of the tank. Lighter solids such as hair, grease and fatty material float, forming a *scum* layer; and liquid (mainly water), which constitutes most of the tank's contents, separates the two solid strata. Bacteria liquify sludge and scum, and as the tank fills, excess liquid (effluent) flows out of the tank into the District's collection lines and is piped to the wastewater treatment plant north of Greer.

If left unchecked, sludge and scum layers will thicken and eventually contact each other. This buildup restricts the flow of sewage into and effluent out of the tank. The result can be contamination of the District's system with material that should have remained in the tank and blocked lines causing wastewater to backup into homes and businesses.

### Proper Operation and Maintenance

It is essential that wastewater entering a solids separator tank from a home or business is "normal" sewage. Materials that are not readily biodegradable, such as cigarette butts, disposable diapers, baby wipes, coffee grounds, cat litter, grease and paper towels, should not be flushed into sewer lines. These materials will contribute to faster buildup of solids within a tank and accelerate tank failure. Noxious chemicals such as drain cleaners, solvents, paint, motor oil, antifreeze and pesticides kill bacteria beneficial to wastewater treatment and pose a threat to the environment. Common household cleaning products such as bleach, detergent and toilet bowl cleaner, if applied sparingly and according to product labels, do not harm beneficial bacteria.

Solids separation systems should be inspected and pumped regularly by a permitted septic contractor. Apache County permits septic pumpers and inspects their vehicles; and ADEQ issues vehicle license numbers. Since 2002, state law requires pre-sale tank inspection with each property transaction. Septic pumpers permitted by Apache County can perform these pre-sale inspections.

Little Colorado Sanitary District is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Tank inspection ensures good repair and proper functioning. A good rule of thumb is to have a tank inspected after the first year of operation. This will assist in determining the rate of solids buildup and the appropriate frequency of pumping. The District requires tank inspections at 8-year intervals; and pumping should occur every three to five years. More frequent pumping may be necessary if garbage disposals are used. A tank should be pumped when the sludge layer exceeds 24 inches in depth. Chemical additives promoted to remove sludge and scum are often ineffectual and do not supplant pumping. Water conservation practices will reduce operation and maintenance costs of the system.

In short, do not wait until a problem is identified. Periodic maintenance, including pumping to remove sludge and scum, will prolong the life of a solids separation tank and minimize environmental and public health impacts.

### Contacts

Thank you for helping us maintain a healthy environment. For more information, do not hesitate to contact the following individuals:

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