



**Know the flow.
Be a part of the
pollution solution.**

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A Citizens Guide to Protecting our Waterways

Simple things
Martin County
residents can do to
make a difference





Toxic algae blooms, St. Lucie Estuary, 2013



Septic SYSTEM Tips:

Why is water quality so important?

Water is a finite and precious natural resource and the source of all life. Access to clean water is essential to live a healthy life.

Whether it is a glass of water at the dinner table, or the pond behind a home; a trip to the sandbar or a visit to the ocean; while floating in a pool or watching children play in a sprinkler, we expect all the water in our lives to be clean and safe for drinking and for many other uses.

From the Atlantic Ocean, to the St. Lucie River and the Indian River Lagoon, to our myriad of wetlands and all the way to Lake Okeechobee, water is the common element that binds Martin County together and makes our community such a special place to live. As residents, we have a responsibility to protect the waterways that play such a vital role in our quality of life.

Maintaining and improving water quality is essential to protect public health and drinking water supplies as well as to support healthy ecosystems, habitats and fisheries, and to enhance abundant opportunities for public recreation and a vibrant tourism economy.

We know that discharges from Lake Okeechobee and other canal systems pollute our waterways. But did you know that we are also a part of the pollution problem? The good news is there are many simple ways to become part of the solution!

This is what happens when we don't maintain our water quality.

Like the human body, aquatic plants and animals need nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen. But too many nutrients can be harmful. Excess nutrients in the water causes algae to grow faster than the environment can handle. It depletes the system of oxygen and can lead to fish lesions and massive fish kills.

The increase in stormwater or nutrient runoff disrupts the natural balance of physical, chemical, and biological processes. It causes pollution in natural systems and creates damage downstream.

Know where your flush flows!

Your Septic System. Maybe you've heard the expression: "The grass is always greener over the septic tank." Actually, it's the drain field, and the grass really is greener – it benefits from the extra moisture and nutrients in the drain field.

A septic tank is simply a big concrete or steel tank that is buried in the yard. The tank might hold 1,000 gallons of water. Wastewater flows into the tank at one end and leaves the tank at the other. This water flows out of the septic tank and into a drain field. A drain field is made of perforated pipes buried in trenches filled with gravel. The water is slowly absorbed and filtered by the ground in the drain field. The size of the drain field is determined by how well the ground absorbs water.

- Help reduce toxic runoff by having your septic tank inspected every 1 to 3 years and pump out your tank every 3 to 5 years.
- Don't drive or park on your septic system. Doing so can compact soils, damage pipes or tank or other components.
- Other items such as cat litter, coffee grounds, grease, and feminine hygiene products can clog the system. Also, the use of garbage disposals will further tax the system. If you use a garbage disposal your septic tank should be pumped more frequently.
- Avoid planting trees and shrubs near the drain field as the roots can cause damage to the system.

SEPTIC vs. SEWER

Sewer. When wastewater is flushed from your toilet or drains from the washing machine, dishwasher, bathtub, or sinks in your home, it flows through your community's sanitary sewer system to a wastewater treatment facility to reduce and remove pollutants.

Whether you have septic or sewer, always flush responsibly! Don't ever dispose of household chemicals, oil, antifreeze, paint, pesticides, beauty products or medicine down the drain.

Did you know Martin County is a 100% reuse county? Our wastewater is treated and used to irrigate golf courses and residential neighborhoods.