



Saint Louis County

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NEWS RELEASE

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St. Louis County residents urged to protect septic systems from freezing

The unusual mix of weather conditions affecting St. Louis County could cause a new sort of problem. The St. Louis County Environmental Services staff is warning that low snowfall amounts and recent rain, followed by the zero degree temperatures forecast for early next week, could lead to potential freezing problems for septic systems. Some common reasons septic systems freeze include: a lack of snow cover during cold weather, cold air entering the system, compacted soil, compacted snow on top of the system and irregular use of the system.

Residents are encouraged to protect their septic systems from freezing through proper homeowner or commercial owner maintenance. Recommended precautions to take now:

- Add a layer of mulch (8-12 inches of hay or straw) over the pipes, tank and soil treatment area. Keep the mulch loose to form air pockets, which act as insulation. This is particularly important if a system is new and vegetative cover has not been well established.
- Use normal amounts of water; the warmer the better. Spread out laundry schedules to one warm/hot load per day.
- Don't leave water running to prevent freezing. A slow trickle could freeze, while a steady stream could overload the system.
- If a homeowner will be gone for a week or more, have someone visit and use hot water regularly.
- Re-route the drip water from high efficiency furnaces. The slow drip can freeze in the pipes. Route this clean water into the footing drain sump or a bucket.
- Fix any leaky plumbing. Small trickles of water going into the system can freeze as thin ice layers within pipes, and eventually close them.
- Keep all vehicles (including ATV's and snowmobiles) off the septic system.

- Make sure all risers, inspection pipes and manholes have tight covers. Adding insulation is a good idea. Check for any cracks in the covers.
- Consider installing a septic tank heater.

Any resident who finds their system frozen, or notes seeping or ponding of sewage, should contact a licensed ISTS pumper or installer, or call St. Louis County Environmental Services for more information at 1-800-450-9278. For additional information on septic system care, visit www.stlouiscountymn.gov/septic.

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