

# Franklin Soil and Water Backyard Conservation Update

## November, 2014

### Talking Poop

Those of us whose homes are connected to municipal or county sewage treatment systems may not realize that many homes in Franklin County use household sewage treatment systems (HSTS). These are commonly referred to as septic systems. Homeowners are responsible for the upkeep, maintenance, pumping and eventual replacement of these systems. When HSTS are not working properly they pollute local waterways and can be a health hazard to the homeowner's family and neighbors.

If your home uses an HSTS, you first need to know if you have a septic tank and drainfield system or if you have an aerator system. The best practices for water use and what should go down the drain are the same for both, but operation, upkeep, maintenance and replacement differ. If a septic tank and drainfield fails, you'll know it because you will have sewage puddle in your yard or it will back up in your house. If an aerator fails, you may not realize it, but raw sewage from your home will be flowing into a nearby ditch or stream. Here are some links to learn more:

[Ways to Keep Your Aeration System Operating Properly](#), from Franklin County Public Health

[Septic System Maintenance](#), from OSU Extension

[Homeowner's Guide to Maintaining Your Household Sewage Treatment System](#), from Franklin County Public Health

[Maintaining Your Septic System—A Guide for Homeowners](#), from the National Environmental Services Center

If your home is within Franklin County but outside the limits of the City of Columbus, you may be eligible for assistance with a failing HSTS through the [Franklin County Home Repair Program](#). This program is funded by the Franklin County Board of Commissioners and managed by the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission.

If you see or smell sewage in Franklin County, report the details to Franklin County Public Health, so they can investigate and work with property owners to correct the problem. Complete their [online complaint form](#) or call (614) 525-4878. If the property you are complaining about is in the City of Columbus please call 311 or use their [online service request center](#).

### The Party's Over: Recycling Political Yard Signs

This coming Saturday, November 15, from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., SWACO is hosting a political sign recycling event at the Bill McDonald Athletic Complex, 4990 Olentangy River Road, Columbus, OH, 43214. SWACO will accept paper and plastic (includes coroplast) signs including metal stands for recycling. These are not acceptable in most local curb-side recycling, so take advantage of this opportunity!

### Thanksgiving and Water Quality

This is not the stretch you might be thinking. What you do in the kitchen can influence water quality. When sanitary sewers have back-ups, the sewage can end up in your basement or spilling over into

local streams and rivers. To prevent either of these occurrences, be careful about what goes down the drain before and after your feast. Grease should never be rinsed down a kitchen drain. When grease cools, it hardens and sticks to the walls of sewer pipes. This is one reason restaurants must have grease traps, which are carefully maintained. At home, I use a coffee can kept under the sink and then tossed in the trash.

Another common Thanksgiving problem is the overuse of the in-sink disposal. This usually leads to problems within the house or in the line out to the sewage main—resulting in clogged drains and the need to find a plumber over the holiday. But when many households are putting so much organic waste into the sanitary sewer system, it can also cause clogging in the larger lines that could lead to overflows.

If you have a septic tank and drainfield or an aerator system, you must be even more careful about what goes down the drain. Make sure that your guests know that nothing goes in the toilet except human waste (and toilet paper) and that nothing goes down the sink except liquids. Try to schedule laundry so that you don't run the washing machine the same day you have lots of kitchen prep and washing up.

Thanksgiving is a good time to remember the compost bin. The trimmings from vegetables and salad-fixings will add needed nitrogen to the carbon of all those leaves you've just raked! Remember though that composting slows down in the cold months. The workhorses of the decomposers, the mesophilic microbes prefer temps in the 50 to 113 degrees F range. So be sure to cover any vegetable and fruit trimmings with leaves or other “browns” so they don't make tempting dining for rats.

## Resource for Teachers Who Go Creeking

We have a web site that allows teachers to share data their students collect from stream quality monitoring field trips. [Read how to use the web site here](#). Stream quality monitoring (SQM or “creeking”) is a great STEM learning activity for students. One of the simplest ways to monitor water quality in local streams is to sample the macroinvertebrate population. By identifying crayfish, freshwater clams, riffle beetles, snails, sowbugs, and a whole host of insect larvae and nymphs, and by observing which ones are found in greater quantity, students learn to distinguish a healthy stream from an unhealthy stream.

SQM provides students with the opportunity to engage in citizen science, using the same methods used by Ohio EPA and ODNR to detect problems and report on the quality of Ohio's streams. Reporting and comparing their data on the SQM web site, then analyzing the causes for any similarities and differences, promotes the skills of 21st Century Learners. While this data isn't “credible” for regulatory purposes, the data students collect can be valuable information on trends in water quality, alerting our watershed coordinator to the need for further monitoring. Sharing that collected data with other groups can also give your students a larger picture of the health of local streams.

## Bring “Leave No Child Inside” to Your Holiday Giving

This year we are combining two of our interests: our support of the Leave No Child Inside movement and our annual participation in the Franklin County Children Services *Holiday Wish* program. For several years we have collected toys donated by our staff and partners to “help put the magic and

sparkle back into the holidays” for children in the care of FCCS. We have also published annual lists for holiday gift giving that encourage children to play outside and interact with the natural world.

This holiday season, we invite you to join us in this effort. You can drop off new, unwrapped toys in our lobby at 1404 Goodale Blvd, Suite 100, Columbus, OH 43212. Ask your own children what they enjoy playing with outside. What did you love playing with outside when you were a kid? A jump rope? Toy trucks for digging in the dirt? A collecting box, *Little Golden Guide to Insects* and magnifying glass? A playground ball that could work for many games, including ones you made up? A fishing pole? (Kids 15 and under don't need a fishing license in Ohio.) This list from on the National Wildlife Federation has some great ideas (although it did receive some comments about gender bias): <http://blog.nwf.org/2012/11/holiday-gifts-for-outdoor-play-think-outside-the-x-box/>

## OK, It's Here, First Snow Forecast

Some reminders:

- Disconnect your rain barrel and restore the downspout so it carries rainwater away from your foundation
- Clean leaves from your roof gutter. Not only can clogged gutters cause water damage to your home, but our streams don't need the added nutrients when leaves and leachate are washed into storm drains.
- Cover bare soil
- Think about salt use before it's necessary. Some chemicals are better for pet paws or sensitive landscaping plants, but they are all problematic for water quality when used carelessly. Use enough salt to be safe, but not so much that there are little clumps left over on dry sidewalks. Also, be careful about storage. It's wasteful to have stored salt dissolve into the ground and it pollutes groundwater.

## Hunter Safety: Review the Fundamentals

When I worked for the USDA Forest Service, one of my fall duties was “hunter patrol.” I wasn't a wildlife officer and I wasn't checking hunting licenses; I was in the woods for fire safety, but spent most of my time helping lost or injured hunters. So many hunting accidents were because the hunter got away from the fundamentals he or she learned as a youngster. Please review the [ODNR Hunter Education Home-Study Manual](#) to remind yourself of the basics. And remember it's more than gun safety; every year someone in Ohio is injured or killed by falling from a tree stand.

There is also a newer safety precaution. Chronic wasting disease has been reported in Ohio, although it is limited to a private hunting facility and is not in Ohio's wild herd. Here is an [ODNR brochure on precautions hunters should](#) take to prevent the spread in Ohio, and the Columbus Dispatch [article on the first diagnosed case in Ohio](#).

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Hope you've enjoyed this Backyard Conservation Update. Feel free to contact me with topics that interest you or questions you may have about conservation in Franklin County. You can also contact us through Facebook ([www.facebook.com/franklinsoilandwater](http://www.facebook.com/franklinsoilandwater)) or Twitter (<https://twitter.com/franklinswcd>).

To be added or removed from this list, please contact Mary Ann Brouillette at (614) 486-9613 x 113 or [mbrouillette@franklinswcd.org](mailto:mbrouillette@franklinswcd.org), or just reply to this e-mail with “remove from list” in the subject line.

Happy Thanksgiving!  
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