

Getting a Septic Pumpout on Protection Island

Who does What

- Coast Environmental comes to Protection Island to pump out septic tanks, and knows the routine over here.
- Septic trucks come over on Wardill Marine's barge. Two trucks can fit on the barge. Barge fees are very high (\$300/hr) and are generally charged the entire time the barge is waiting for the septic pumpout trucks on Protection Island, as well as the time to and from PI.
- Neither company will keep a list of places needing a septic pumpout or will organise islanders to make a septic pumpout happen. Someone on the island has to take the lead to make this happen each time.

How it works

- Your septic system has two parts – a solid waste settling tank that needs to be pumped out every 5 or so years, and another tank for liquid waste that you pump into the city system using the pump you maintain.
- When your system is running optimally, the grey and black waste from your house flows by gravity into the solids settling tank, and the excess liquid regularly flows by gravity into the liquids tank. Your septic system includes a float switch in your liquids tank, which determines when your septic pump should turn itself on and then off (about ten minutes later; it should not run for hours). Depending on the household water/sewage use, the pump could come on daily or less often. The liquids tank also has an alarm that lets you know if the liquids level has risen well above normal, meaning the pump is not able to extract the liquid down to the pump shut-off level.
- The septic pumpout is to empty the solid waste tank.
- Everyone's tank is a different size ranging from about 500 to 1000 gallons or so. A few rare systems have 2 solid waste tanks totalling approx. 1500 gallons. The average size is 500 to 700 gallons.
- Each septic truck can carry a set amount of waste. E.g. 1900 gallons, 2200 gallons, or 2500 gallons.
- When your pump is working properly, your tank will always have the same amount of waste in it including 3 layers: crust, liquid, and sludge. Pumpout is not normally because of a "full tank" in the sense of volume, but rather because there is too much crust and sludge, which starts to affect the draining of the liquid to the liquids tank.
- If your septic pump is not working properly, the level in both tanks may be higher. This does not necessarily mean that a pumpout is needed. The pump problems at the liquids tank should be addressed. When the levels in the liquids tank are back to optimal, the solid waste tank can then be assessed in terms of the crust and sludge amounts.
- See Terry Gordon's info on how to tell when a pumpout is needed. Your septic alarm going off or pump not working does NOT necessarily mean that you need a pumpout.
- If the pump to the liquid waste tank is not working, the level of waste in both tanks will be higher, so the volume extracted by the pumpout truck will be more than just the usual volume of the solid waste tank. This will fill the septic truck more, and therefore allow less pumping of other peoples' tanks.
- Due to variance in each home's size of tank and in the amount each septic truck can carry, as well as whether the liquid waste pumps are working, it is not known ahead of time exactly how many homes can be serviced. Coastal indicated that you should expect that a total of 4500 to 5000 gallons will be pumped out into their two trucks. So you can count on 5 homes being done, usually a 6th is done, and sometimes a 7th is done. It is best to have 7 homes lined up with the latter two understanding that they are "maybes".
- It takes 30 to 60 minutes to pump out a tank unless something unexpected happens to have it take longer.
- The longer it takes, the more the barge costs, thus efficiency of organisation is important.

Organising Steps

1. Contact Larry Wardill at 250-616-6000 to book a barge date. When he can do it is dependent on tides as well as how busy he is. He told us that he prefers to confirm the booking only after all other islanders are lined up.
2. Contact Jackie or Celine at Coast Environmental at 250-753-7552 to book the septic trucks. They want at least one week's notice and confirmation that the barge is booked.
3. Advertise for other islanders to join you.
4. Get contact info from each household and list them in order that they sign up. Expect changes in this list as people start to understand if they actually need a pumpout or not.
5. Collect deposit for the barge fee to ensure you don't end up paying for anyone (the organiser who contacts Wardill is responsible for paying the whole barge fee).
6. Ask islanders to call Coast Environmental to leave credit card info to cover their fee. This will be charged to them after the job is done.
7. Ask islanders to email Jackie and cc you with the following info: location of tank, size of tank if you know, approx. length from truck to tank, if there are any branches or other obstructions, if there is an incline or slope to tank from truck.
8. Ask for two volunteers to be a ride-along with the driver to keep the route driving efficient. Ensure they have a cell phone with them and make sure you have their number.
9. Set the route for each truck and mark it out on a map of Protection Island. Make copies for organiser, each driver, and the ride-alongs.
10. Make sure you have a list of everyone and their phone number on septic pumpout day so you can use it as needed.
11. Ask everyone to locate their tank and do a test run of opening it before the septic pumpout day.

Day of Pumpout

1. Be at the ready to trouble shoot and liaise with everyone as needed.
2. Have two people meet the barge to be the ride-alongs to direct the drivers to where they are going, as per the maps you have created.
3. Make sure everyone has their tanks opened and a garden hose at the ready BEFORE the truck arrives at their house. (the clock is ticking on the expensive barging!)
4. As soon as the driver seems finished draining the tank, ask them to wait/watch a moment while you flush a toilet or two before they leave.
5. Once it is done, get the final barge cost from Larry Wardill and pay it via e-transfer, as requested.
6. Calculate the final cost per household and send email to participants regarding if they owe more for barge, will get a bit back, or are paid up exactly right. If they need to get some back, get it to them; if they need to pay more, collect it from them.

Breathe a sigh of relief that this big job is done again! Many folks use bacterial additives and/or refrain from putting toilet paper down to keep their septic tanks happy and needing pumpout less often.

And, while not directly related to the pumping out, if you are not already familiar with how your septic system works, get to know it, ensure your pump system is being maintained often enough, and remember, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure 😊