

## 2-24-12 Tight Expenditures

Every once in a while my office receives calls about properties with tight tanks. The way the questions are posed is the interesting thing. The person might say, "I know it has a tight tank system." And I have to explain that a tight tank is not any sort of "system". It is just a tight tank and a tight tank is a holding tank. When it is full, it needs to be emptied.

The houses with a tight tank do, indeed, sell. They sell for somewhat less than homes with a true, working septic system, with a functioning leaching area, but they do sell. It is critical, however, that the owners of a tight tank understand the necessity of conserving water, in order for this ownership to succeed.

While much of this planet sees a scarcity of fresh water, in the USA most of us take it for granted. Some of us pay per month for a municipal water supply and some of us have our own private well water. In either case, why waste it? That is the constant and necessary question when we have a tight tank.

In Massachusetts, our Department of Environmental Protection uses the number of 55 gallons per person per day. They figure two people per bedroom. So, that is why you see on septic plans the figure of 110 gallons per day per bedroom. At that rate, without conserving water, two people would fill a tight tank in two and a half weeks!

A typical tight tank holds 2,500 gallons. The alarm goes off at about 2,000 gallons. (You can raise this alarm float a bit after you are accustomed to using the tank.) When you call the septage hauling company (the pumping company), they will come out to your home, look at the level in the tank and let you know about how much longer you could have waited before pumping it out. After two or three visits you can safely raise that float in the tank a bit, causing the alarm to sound closer to the top. Why sound the alarm (and feel the panic) when you have two week's worth of storage?

In addition to working out the schedule of emptying the tank there is the main question of how rapidly, or how slowly, you shall fill it. That is completely dependent on how dedicated you are to conserving the use of water. Do you let the water run when you brush your teeth? Could you use a glass of water instead? Do you use a basin within the sink for soaking and scrubbing dishes and silverware? That is an old fashioned method that comes in handy with a tight tank.

Most people with a tight tank do not wash clothes at their home. However, there are now high efficiency washing machines using half the use of water of the conventional washing machine. This might make it possible to wash clothes at home, depending on other conservation measures. That is up to the homeowner. An energy star dishwasher is worth having, as it uses about two thirds the use of a standard dish washer and one fourth the use of water with hand washing!

If you are considering the costs of owning a home with a tight tank, plan on about \$250 per two thousand gallons for the pumping cost. How often that happens is up to the owners and how well (or poorly) they conserve water. For some, that cost is once a month. For others, that cost is every two or three months. Think of it as part of your monthly mortgage.

Some home owners with a tight tank invest in a composting toilet for at least one of their toilets, as it uses no water at all. I think that investment will pay off and earn its keep.

So, what do you think? It is up to you. Can you conserve water? Are you using the property only as a vacation property and, therefore, you feel that the part-time use makes this possible?

Before deciding, make sure you speak to the local board of health about the property, the soils, and the potential choices. Every once in a while it is possible to re-visit exploring the soils with a perc test. It is worth considering. Is there room for a system? Speak to the local health agent, for free, and find out!

Is a tight tank right for you? Is the location worth the cost of this ongoing expense? Only you can decide.

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