



**UPPER RARITAN WATERSHED ASSOCIATION**

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**Taking Responsibility for Your Septic System**

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In an effort to align its operating practices with the larger mission of the organization, the Upper Raritan Watershed Association has recently taken several important steps towards improving the environmental sustainability of its daily operations. Last December, URWA purchased a highly efficient hybrid vehicle, a Honda Civic. The hybrid has been used by Executive Director Cindy Ehrenclou to attend community events and statewide meetings. The vehicle has already saved hundreds of gallons of gasoline (and URWA dollars) while serving as a striking reminder to the community about URWA's commitment to improving our environment.

In addition, the organization has made an important "green" addition in the development of its strategic plan. The new plan challenges URWA to fully analyze its energy and material consumption practices, and then establish benchmarked goals for improving the efficiency of our operations. URWA supporters will likely first notice these operational changes during the June 7th dance at Upton Pyne Barns, where URWA's event committee will work to produce a party that is high on fun, but low on waste, incorporating responsibly sourced food and beverages and environmentally friendly reusable decorations.

URWA invites everyone across the watershed to join in the work towards improved sustainability. Each month, URWA will offer simple guidance for improving environmental efficiency and sustainability in your home and office. Since so many residents of the Upper Raritan Watershed have on-site private septic systems, the focus this spring is on septic system management practices.

**Septic systems** are remarkably cost-efficient and highly effective at wastewater treatment, but their long-term viability is dependent upon active maintenance and upkeep. Proper maintenance plays a large part in safeguarding clean drinking water, as failure to maintain these systems can result in the contamination of surface and groundwater supplies. The National Small Flows Clearinghouse ([http://www.nesc.wvu.edu/nsfc/nsfc\\_septicnews.htm](http://www.nesc.wvu.edu/nsfc/nsfc_septicnews.htm)) is a great resource for septic and rural wastewater management information. It offers some great basic tips for a long-lasting and trouble-free system:

- Conserve water to avoid overloading the septic system. Be sure to repair any leaky faucets or toilets. Use low-flow fixtures.
- Do not put grease or cooking oil into the system, or use caustic drain openers when the drain becomes clogged. Instead, use boiling water or a drain snake to open clogs.

- Do not use septic tank additives, commercial septic tank cleansers, yeast, sugar, etc. These products are not necessary and some may be harmful to your system.
- Use biodegradable bathroom cleaners and laundry detergents. Avoid household products with chlorine and antibacterial soap that inhibit the natural breakdown of waste. Baking soda is a good choice to clean toilets, sinks and showers.
- Check with your local regulatory agency if you have a garbage disposal to make sure that your septic system can accommodate this additional waste.
- Check with your local regulatory agency before allowing water softener backwash to enter your septic tank.
- Do not poison your system with harmful chemicals such as solvents, oils, paints, disinfectants, pesticides or similar substances that can contaminate groundwater.

Your septic system should not be used as a trash receptacle. Do not put disposable diapers, sanitary products, paper towels, facial tissues, cotton swabs, coffee grounds, cat litter or cigarettes into your septic system. These items quickly fill your septic tank with solids, decrease its efficiency, and will require that you pump it out frequently. They may also clog the sewer line to the septic system, causing wastewater to back up into your home.

### **About the Upper Raritan Watershed Association**

The Upper Raritan Watershed Association is a not-for-profit, membership supported organization working to secure the environmental future of the Upper Raritan Watershed through advocacy, land preservation, education and research. Since 1959, the Association has been preserving and protecting natural resources throughout the watershed, a 194 square mile natural geographic region defined by the drainage basin of the North Branch of the Raritan River and its tributaries. The watershed, which includes 23 municipalities in parts of Somerset, Hunterdon and Morris Counties, is a vital link in New Jersey's water supply system and contains large areas of undeveloped, environmentally significant land.

For More Information, please contact:

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