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Snohomish County Public Works Department

**Septic System Owners**  
**FOCUS GROUP RESULTS**

June 23, 2009

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**ER**  
**ELWAY RESEARCH, INC.**



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Snohomish County Public Works Department

## **Septic System Owners**

### **FOCUS GROUP RESULTS**

**June 23, 2009**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This report presents the findings from two focus groups conducted on behalf of the Snohomish County Surface Water Management Division. The primary objective of the groups was to test materials that had been designed to promote better care of septic systems.

The materials consisted of:

- A handout called "Caring for Your Septic System" that detailed best practices.
- A series of mailers, with return postcards.
- A list of potential taglines.
- Possible web addresses.

The focus groups consisted of owners of residential septic systems in the county. The first group included 10 septic owners from rural locations, and the second group 11 from suburban areas. The groups were recruited to each include a mix of ages, and a balance of genders.

In addition to discussing each item, participants rated the items using wireless keypads. Both the ratings and a summary of the discussion are presented in this report.

Participants were selected from lists provided by the county. Households were called at random and the person in the household "most responsible for home maintenance" was screened before being invited to attend the forum. (Advertising, media, Snohomish County employees, renters and non-septic owners were excluded.) Participants were paid a \$60 stipend to attend.

The group was facilitated by Stuart Elway of Elway Research, Inc. The moderator's guide was designed in close collaboration with The Snohomish County Public Works Department and the Snohomish Health District.



## METHODS

<b>TECHNIQUE:</b>	Two focus groups with discussion and Interactive Polling.
<b>PARTICIPANTS:</b>	Group 1: 10 septic system owners from rural Snohomish County. Group 2: 11 septic system owners from suburban Snohomish County.
<b>GROUP DATE:</b>	June 23, 2009.
<b>DATA COLLECTION:</b>	Participant input was gathered via interactive polling and facilitated discussion. Interactive polling uses wireless individual handsets with which participants respond to questions. The tabulated results are projected instantly and discussed. Participants are asked to explain and comment on their responses.
<b>DATA ANALYSIS</b>	The results displayed in these charts are percentages based upon the number of participants answering each question. There were 21 participants, but not every person answered every question, so the percentages are based on different totals.

It is important to remember that, even though participants were randomly selected and survey-type questions were used, this method does not produce a statistically representative sampling of public opinion. These results can be interpreted only as representing the answers given by these participants in the context of this meeting.



# SUMMARY

## PARTICIPANTS WERE EXPERIENCED SEPTIC OWNERS

The participants' experience with septic systems matched what has been found in quantitative surveys of Snohomish County:

- Most had lived with septic systems for more than 20 years, and
- Their current system was over 20 years old.

Also, as has been seen previously (in surveys and forums), many owners did not know their type of system (3 respondents in each group were not sure.) Those who did know were most likely to have gravity systems.

**Table 1**  
**System Profiles**

	Rural	Suburban
<b>Years With System</b>		
2 - 4	1 (11%)	1 (9%)
5 - 9	0	1 (9%)
10 - 19	1 (11%)	1 (9%)
20+	7 (78%)	8 (73%)
<b>Current System Age</b>		
2 - 4 Years	1 (10%)	0
5 - 9	0	3 (27%)
10 - 19	2 (20%)	1 (9%)
20+	7 (70%)	6 (55%)
Not Sure	0	1 (9%)
<b>System Type</b>		
Gravity	3 (38%)	6 (55%)
LPD	2 (25%)	0
Other	0	3 (18%)
Not Sure	3 (38%)	3 (27%)



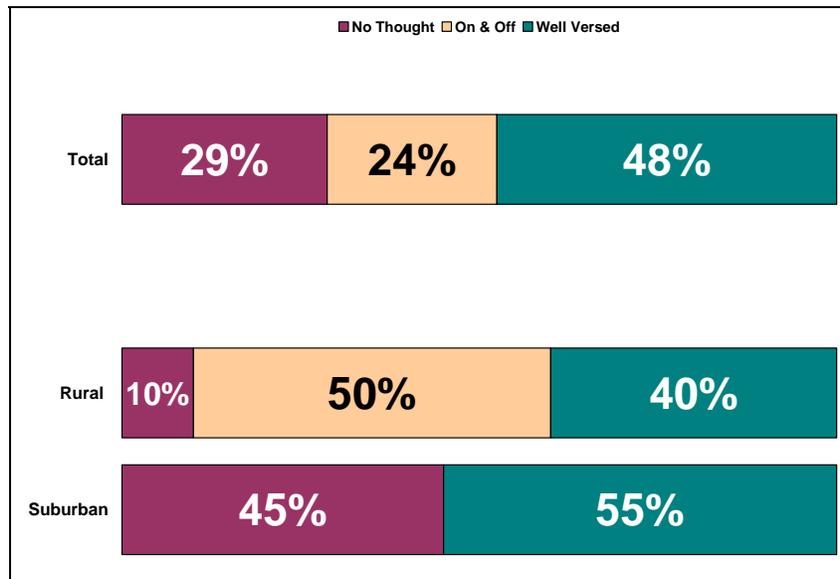
Many participants (4, or 40%, in the rural group, 6/55% in the suburban) described themselves as "well-versed" in septic system care. However, the suburban group included almost as many who said that they "don't give it much thought until something goes wrong" (5/45%).

Asked what "well-versed" meant to them, two explained:

*I know how long it's supposed to be pumped or when it's supposed to be pumped. I try not to put garbage down...I make sure I don't have garbage on my dishes when I use the dishwasher, and I try not to use the washing machine more than just a couple of times maybe a day so that it doesn't get overflowing.*

*I know that it needs to be pumped, like, every three to five years, and I know that it's better to use liquid detergent versus the powder stuff. We don't have a garbage disposal, and I make sure my dishes are cleaned off good before I put (them) in the dishwasher, too.*

### Knowledge of Septic System



Question 5: How would you describe your knowledge of your septic system? I'm well versed in its care and maintenance, I pay attention to it off and on, (or) I don't give it much thought until something goes wrong.

In both groups, participants said that they find out about septic system care by various means, including word of mouth, classes, from friends, "the guy that was pumping the tanks," and by doing some maintenance themselves. One person remembered getting a video about septic care when the family moved into the house:

*But we didn't watch it, of course.*

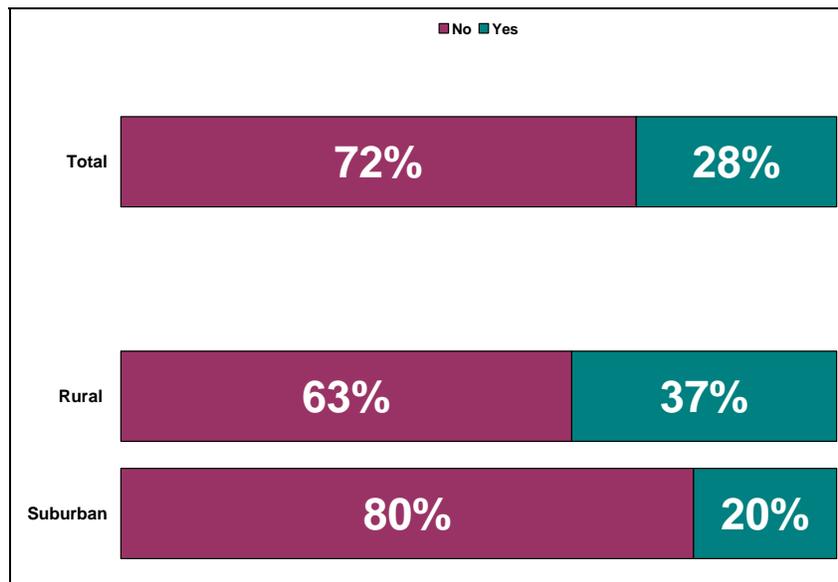


Both groups contained intermittent discussions indicating that participants were far from "well-versed." This included:

- those who did not know the location of their drain fields,
- surprise that homes were supposed to have reserve fields,
- debates over powder vs. liquid detergent,
- use of enhancers, and
- admittance that they have trees over their drainfields and
- comments that they had never heard about care with bath oils or bleach.

Several participants in each group had experienced problems/needed repairs to their systems, although there was some difficulty in distinguishing the issue of "repairs" from maintenance and pumping.

### Repairs in Past Year



Question 3: Have you had repairs on your system?



## Who Are They Going to Call? Private Companies

It was almost universal that, if there were septic troubles detected, participants would call a private, commercial (usually local) company, including "the septic pump cleaner person," "local companies," and "the company that maintains it."

When probed about possibly calling Snohomish County, almost all were very negative. The Health District was termed "the same thing."

*They'd be the last people I'd call.*

*Well, they'd probably find a protected fish down there and I probably couldn't do anything.*

*I am so afraid that they are going to want me to pay to hook up to the sewer.*

*Hopefully the county wouldn't find out, because then they'd have their nose in it.*

*If you called the county, then they'd send their guys out there, and they would really set you up with a fine system...\$20,000 or \$30,000 or something.*

One respondent pointed out that private companies were supposed to report adverse conditions. A few responded that this was why they first tried to solve any problems themselves.

At several points in each group, some participants would mention that the Health Department could be helpful because they stored the original system licensing and could provide location and type information for any residence with septic.

*I basically actually did meet with the Snohomish Health Department and they showed me the layout of how our septic looks, because that was determining how many people could use it.*

*I kept the file from Snohomish County Health Department... the plan that we had to file at the time the system, the as-built, and you know you can go to the county and they'll give that to you for nothing.*



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# BEST PRACTICES HANDOUT

In general, participants were positive toward the "Caring for Your Septic System" handout. There was broad agreement on its usefulness, size, and format. It was called "really nice," and "a pretty good card." Many would keep it, and mentioned the laundry room, garage, taped to the inside of cupboard doors, "in my house file," or "in my file with my septic information" as handy places for it to be stored.

One person who would not keep the card said:

*If I wanted to look at it, I would just go on the internet and find it.*

Other specific suggestions were:

- Make different cards for different types of septic systems.
- Make it long, in one column, so it fits on the hot water heater.
- Allow spaces for notes, such as the maintenance record/schedule.
- Highlight the most common problems.

A few were receptive to the idea of a refrigerator magnet, although not with all of the same information. A magnet with "just the bottom line," an 800 number, or a website address were all suggested.

In going through each section, there were multiple questions and comments that indicated some of the information would not be accepted. Most problematic was the necessity of including information for all types of systems, and potentially "turning off" those not covered by a specific recommendation. This would require, though, that more recipients knew their type of system. For this reason, it was suggested several times that the card include information on how to find out more about one's own specific system from the Health District.

When participants were led through each section of the handout, the following reactions were noteworthy:

## **"Keep solids, toxics, oils and greases out of the drain"**

This section was called "clear," and "cut and dried." For some it contained new information; for others not.



The advice on powdered detergents and drain de-cloggers raised the most discussion. (Some drain de-cloggers were said to be labeled as "safe for septic systems"). Limiting bath oil and "excessive soap" was news to a few. One wondered about there being a "right" kind of toilet paper.

Several participants wanted more information than what *not* to do; that is, if they could not put certain substances down the drain, where was it to go? (This was asked in particular of bleach that was used as a disinfectant.)

There was also incomplete acceptance of the warning against garbage disposals. One participant explained the "bacteria theory":

*"You throw something (in) every now and then, just so there's something rotting, I guess, to make bacteria thrive."*

Others said that there should be enough material in a septic system to make bacteria. One raised the question of potential harm by anti-bacterial soaps.

### **"Reduce and control water usage"**

Several participants called this section "practical," although it raised discussions of variation according to house size. The suburban group questioned how many people would comply.

The highest acceptance seemed to be with the "fix leaks" advice. Otherwise, there were rumblings that several items were less tolerable:

1. Low flow toilets had many opponents.

*Low-flows aren't great.*

*It takes 20 flushes.*

2. Spacing out laundry was called "kind of a pain in the rear."

*When they're in a washing mode, they want to get it done.*

### **"Perform tank pumping and maintenance"**

This also was "clear," but not widely accepted. In particular, the "6 months" end of the scale seemed unreasonable to almost everyone, with every "3 to 4 years" being somewhat reasonable and known, but not uniformly accepted.

*I think that's the message you hear. It's not necessarily what I do.*

*With our family, there's just the two of us, it doesn't need it every three years.*

*The numbers seem excessive.*

*A septic tank pumping company probably came up with these numbers.*

There were multiple mentions of known gravity systems (theirs, or someone else's) that were virtually never pumped. This was one of the main points of discussion as to the need for advice that was more specific to the type of system. Printing a range of



numbers, with frequent maintenance which was very possibly not applicable to the recipient, was termed a potential "turn-off." One participant suggested that the line "depending on your system type" should come first in the statement.

*I think it depends on the type of system you have, too. And how many people.*

*I just pumped my rental house after 35 years.*

*You stop reading right away, when you think it's not reasonable for you.*

The line about "state-licensed or Health District-certified service provider" also raised eyebrows, particularly in the suburban group. They were mystified as to actuality of such providers, and a bit suspicious.

Given the low level of knowledge some had about their systems, many were also flummoxed by the reference to an "outlet screen."

*I don't even know if we have an outlet screen.*

### **"Protect your drainfield and reserve areas"**

There was initially wide-spread agreement with this section, but the discussion turned into excuses for less-than-perfect adherence:

*Yeah, I see nothing wrong with that. That's common sense.*

*Yeah, yeah, everybody knows that.*

*But I know they put the drainfield right where I wanted to put some landscaping.*

The reference to "sprinkler systems" was confusing to at least one, who wondered if it meant that above-ground sprinklers could not be used.

Several had never heard of "reserve fields."

*I never heard that.*

*I haven't, either.*

*It seems odd to me when you have...a small lot.*

### **"Regularly inspect your drainfield"**

Many called this "clear," but others were negative, and not accurate about what was intended:

*Kind of meaningless.*

*You're really not going to be digging it up to see if it's draining.*

*Most people don't know where their drainfield is.*



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# MAILERS

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The participants were shown a series of similar mailers, each including a return postcard that would allow them to request either:

- A "free house call from a sanitarian;"
- A phone call so that they could ask questions; and/or
- To be put on a mailing list for classes and workshops.

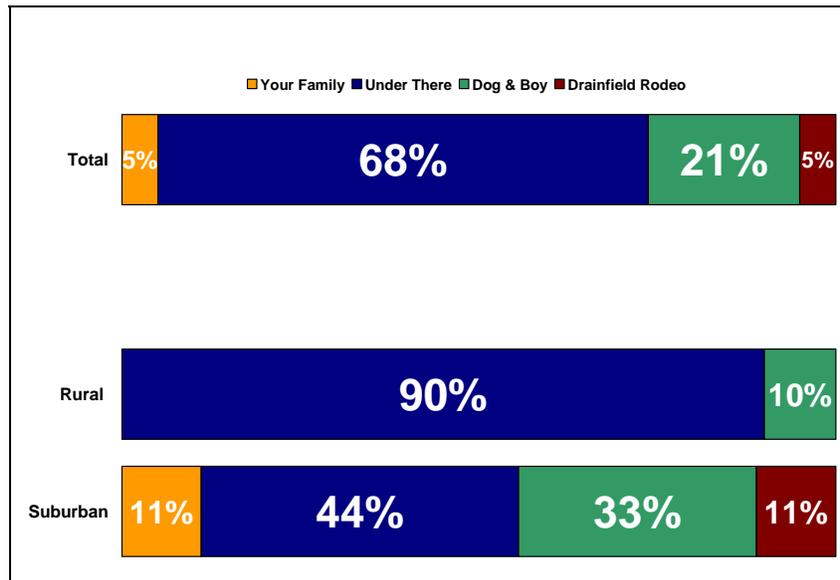
The mailers were rated (from "1 - ineffective" to "3 - compelling"), and there were votes for "favorite." Many of the comments pertained to all the mailers.

"Septic system Check up" was favored by the most participants, in particular:

- 13 out of 19, or 68% overall;
- 9 in 10 in the rural group; and
- 4 in 9 (44%) of the suburban group.

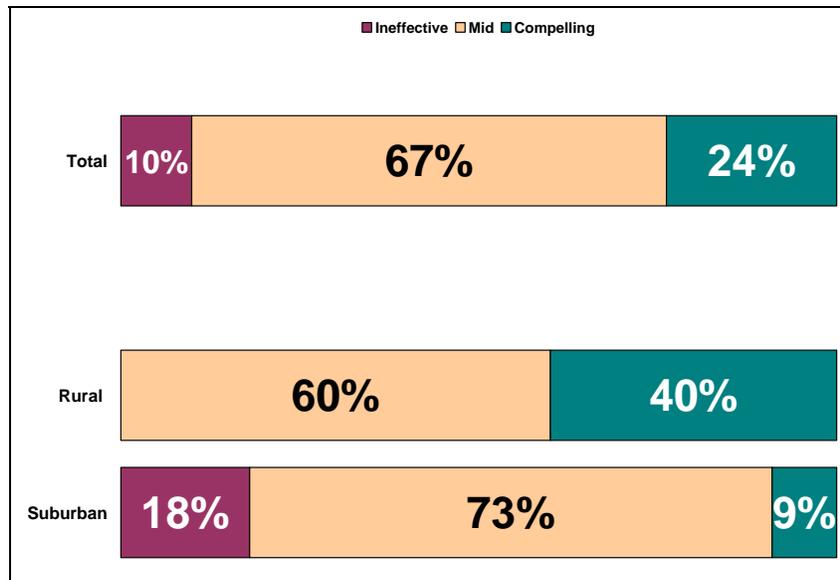


### “Septic Check Up” Top-Rated Mailer



Question 10: I am going to hand out some things that might arrive in the mail. Take a look and write down your reaction. Overall favorite.

### Few Rate “Septic Check Up” Ineffective



Question 7: What is the first thing that comes into your head? What is your overall reaction? Rate Ineffective = 1...2...3 = Compelling, "Your septic system's under there".



The reasons for the "Septic Check Up" preferences were:

- The cover message "Septic system care is up to you" was overwhelmingly favored over the "An important message" line on the other mailers.

*100 percent better.*

*It's a fact. It's not a question. It's not leading into "open me."*

*It's ownership. It makes it yours.*

*(I'm not) particularly impressed with important messages that come to me from the county. Something that tells me that caring for my septic system is up to me, that's more interesting. ...a little less invasive.*

- The diagram on the inside of "Septic Check Up" was also lauded, for the health check up metaphor and for the schematic of the system, which was a "reminder" of what's in a system for those who had heard before, and education for recipients who were unfamiliar with septic systems.

*(It) shows what is really going on in there.*

*"Some people don't know that they have a drainfield."*

- The inside was so popular that the suburban group insisted on being able to vote on their favorite inside – separate from the rest of the mailer – which was clearly "Septic Check Up" (8 of 11 "votes"). Those who voted against it thought a message that included avoiding repair expense would be more effective.
- The back photo was also well-liked, because it was "cute," seemed more up-to-date, and did indeed look like a back yard. Several participants did think that a dog should be included.

*I don't have children, but I have dogs.*

*And it makes you think, too, the kids are on the grass above the septic.*

- The small, front photo was liked for having three generations and a dog.

### **"Boy and Dog" Lauded for Money Message**

"Dog and Boy" (with the inside message "You've got a big investment") was second in overall favorites, with:

4 out of 19, or 21% overall rating it their favorite;

1 in 9 in the rural group; and

3 in 9 in the suburban group.

Those who preferred "Boy and Dog"/"You've got a big investment out there!" were particularly taken by the "prevent expensive repairs" message.

*Putting in a new system is very expensive.*

*That'll really catch your attention and make you think twice.*

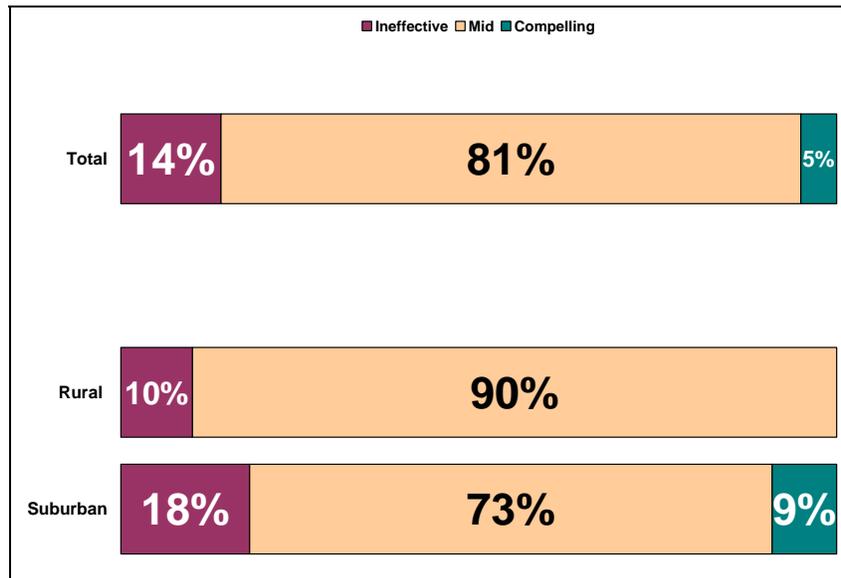
*(I like) that it's not a "scare tactic."*



Negatives included:

- The small, family photo on the front ("outdated");
- “An important message about your septic system.”  
*(It) feels like it’s a solicit message; you don’t look at the Snohomish County.*
- The particular house photo, which did not look like Snohomish County to most. It was called "too rural" (even from the rural group), "too blue," and needed some landscaping (shrubs, flowers, or at least one tree.)  
*They don’t have one tree.*  
*Looks like Iowa.*  
*No alder trees; no skunk cabbage.*
- Many did not like the "Get the connection?" line:  
*They may as well add, "stupid."*  
*“Do I get the connection between a dog and a kid and a septic tank? No, because my dog doesn’t use the septic system.”*

**“Boy and Dog” Gets Mostly “Mid” Ratings**



Question 8: What is the first thing that comes into your head? What is your overall reaction? Rate Ineffective = 1...2...3 = Compelling, “Your family – your septic system, get the connection?” (Boy and dog on cover).



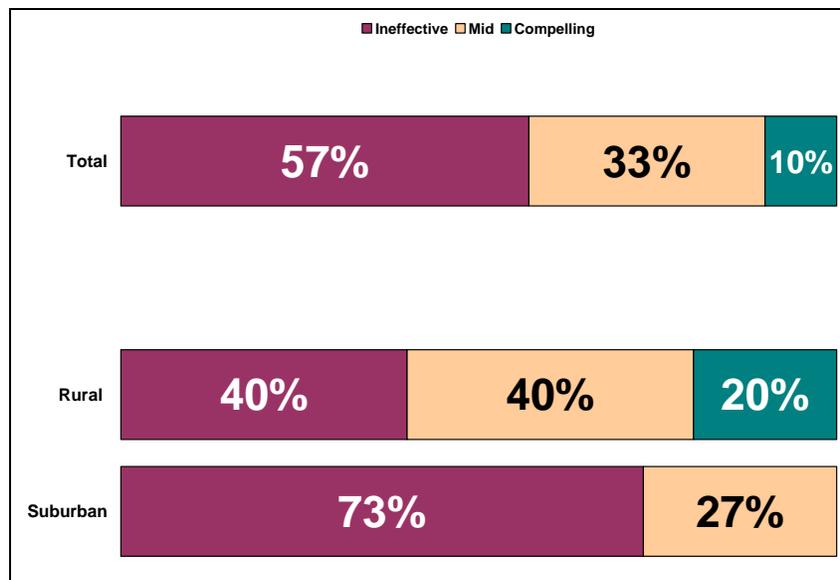
### “Your family/Your septic system” and “Rodeo” Score Lowest

The "Your family/Your Septic System" mailer illustrated the notions that the photo is critical and humor hard to pull off. Particular negatives were the (again) out-dated photo, that it clearly was not in a back yard, the house-with-huge-toilet art visual inside, and the "78,000 homes rely on septic" "scare tactic" statistic (some in the suburban even questioned that the number was accurate.)

*This is a public park!*

*If the county wants to spend money they should do it on educating people on how to use and maintain their septic system, and not scaring people that you're putting your family at risk if you're one of the 78,000 homes that rely on septic systems.*

#### “Your Family”



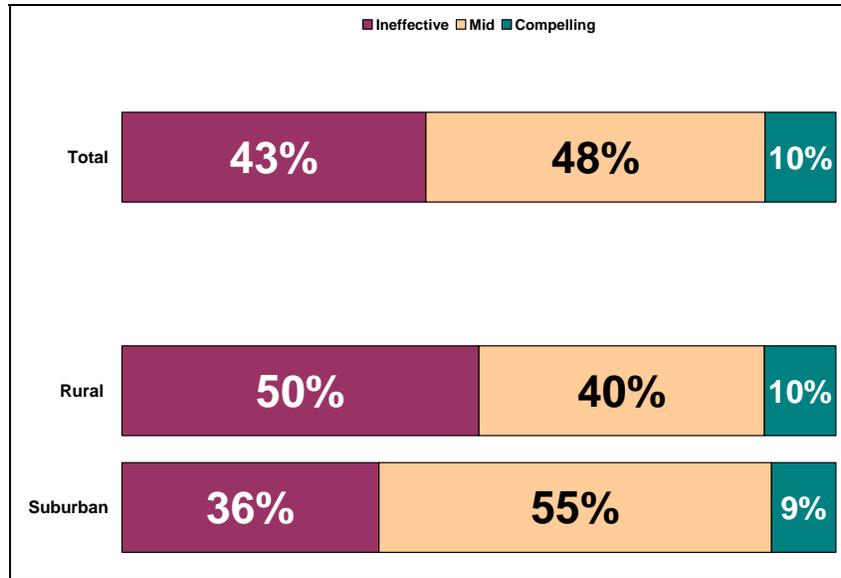
Question 6: What is your overall reaction? Rate Ineffective = 1...2...3 = Compelling, "Your family - septic system's under there" (family picnic on cover).



### Drainfield Rodeo

Similarly, few said anything good about "Drainfield Rodeo," except that it might appeal more to single parents. Several thought that referring to septic "danger" was too "in your face." One suggestion was to start with the second paragraph ("The Snohomish Health District is committed...")

#### "Drainfield Rodeo"



Question 9: What is the first thing that comes into your head? What is your overall reaction? Rate Ineffective = 1...2...3 = Compelling, "Drainfield Rodeo".

If this message were to be used, the expense of repairs should be added to it:

*Yeah, so where it says, "A failing septic system is a serious health risk to your family and pets," they should probably include, "And expensive."*

*It always is important, yeah. It gets your attention real quick.*

As often happens with humor, some did not get the cover photo:

*I don't live in a place where I can have horses.*

*Did his horse sink in the drainfield?*

*I think anytime they tried to apply humor is just stupid.*



## "Sanitarian" Not Well Received in Any Mailer

Several concerns were consistent across all of the mailers. Foremost among these was great suspicion of allowing a county employee onto their property and the term "sanitarian" in general. One person said that "sanitarian" gave him "the heebie-jeebies." Many just looked at the labels next to the boxes on return form, and did not understand that the sanitarian was a Health District employee.

*What's a "sanitarian"?*

*I would like to find out more about that guy.*

*Who do they work for?*

*It's not something you look up in the phone book.*

*This is after the initial permit process?*

Knowing that the Health District was responsible did not help, as so many were fearful that allowing such a person onto their property would result in greater expense from fines or requirements to upgrade or make repairs. Several assumed that the County's goal would be to switch the home over to the sewer system.

*I think my husband's and my reaction would be, "This is fine. But if it's not broken, don't fix it." Because I think once you get the county in, they've got an in, they know everything about you, "Well, you've got to do this. You've got to do this. And you have to have a permit to do it."*

*If I got this in the mail I would check the one "Put me on your mailing list for classes and workshops" because I'm a single woman; I know zippo about things like this, and I would go to a class or a workshop. I would probably not invite someone to come to my house because of the general mistrust of them telling me I have to do \$10,000 worth of work, but I would go to a class or a workshop where I could get information.*

*My assumption would be that they're going to look at your drainfield and see if you've planted trees on it or something.*

*People are concerned that somebody is going to come in and tell them that they have to change their septic system or upgrade it or change it at a cost to the homeowner.*

*They have a hammer of authority and they use it.*

*In an older home-type situation, you don't want them in your business, you don't want them going and checking stuff out.*

*You'd have to be crazy [to invite them onto your property].*

One participant explained that septic owners have already "pulled away from the government a little bit." Some felt that there needed to be more reassurance that the sanitarian would give advice or education only. Several expressed concern that they would be told to "replace the whole thing."

*You have to explain more what the guy's going to do.*



*I think if you want somebody to be interested in doing this, you've got to tell them what's in it for them.*

*You don't want them telling you now you have a stipulation or else you're going to have this, this, or that happen. You want more coming in with friendly, helpful information and giving you the option to make the choice.*

*Maybe they should say "We'd be happy to help you in an objective way where we're not going to tell anybody."*

As part of this suspicion, a few were skeptical of the inside language in the two mailers ("Drainfield Rodeo" and "Dog and Boy") that read "the Snohomish Health District is committed to helping you maintain your septic system." They scoffed that the Health District was certainly not going to pay for needed repairs. One thought there should be language included that the free inspection could lead to other free options.

*How are they going to do that? ... Are they going to have an inspector come out to your house all the time? How are they going to help you?*

*They're going to "help you". They're not going to pay for any repairs...*

*If anything, they'll charge you for a permit and stuff.*

*They're there to make money, not to lose money*

A few went so far as to see the visits as part of a larger plot, and others questioned the expense of a home visit. There were suggestions that residents would have more trust in a private firm, and that the County should instead pay for an inspection from the home owner's choice of private firms. A perceived bonus was that this would also provide work for local companies.

*Why can't they simply learn about the proper care of your system by mailing you pamphlets or something?"*

*Why don't they send you a coupon that you take to your local participating service dealer?*

*They're getting ready to set Snohomish County up, like [unintelligible] Island where they have mandatory septic inspections.*

*When did the government start taking over individual rights and responsibilities for the homeowner? Doesn't a septic system belong to the individual? Until you invite them in?*



## **Confusion About Public Works and Health District Cooperation**

Participants in both groups were confused about unexplained references to both the Health District and the County Public Works Department. Again, suspicions were raised when it was noted that the inside of the mailer talked about the Health District, while the address and return address were for Snohomish County Public Works.

*It's called 'bait and switch.'*

*The Health Department is not on 300 Rockefeller.*

*Surface Water Management has taken over the Health Department is basically what it amounts to."*

*If they're going to have a sanitarian coming out, why doesn't it go to the Health District?*

## **Most Generally Down on the Mailers**

At the end of this section of the discussion most participants said that they would probably "just pitch" or recycle such a mailer that came to their home. A couple were indignant about the use of public funds.

*I would just toss it.*

*I don't like my tax money going to paper stuff like this.*

*I was going to say, if you put one big note on there, put "Taxpayers do not like postage-paid paper."*

A few said that they would be more likely to open it if the County and/or Health District logo were bigger.

*Because that gets your attention.*

Other overall comments/suggestions were:

*Add as option looking at a website.*

*Add information on how to find out from the Health District about your type of system and its location.*



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# TAG LINES

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A total of 22 tag lines were tested by having participants rate each on a simple scale of 1= Ineffective; 2 = Neutral; 3= Compelling.

As with any scale, there are various ways to interpret the results, for example: the proportion of participants who rate a slogan as “compelling”; the average score; and the “polar ratio” of “compelling” to “ineffective” ratings. The three are related, of course, but each method yields a slightly different picture of the results.

The raw “compelling” proportion, for example, indicates the attractiveness of the slogan, irrespective of its detractors.

The “polar ratio” omits the middle and compares how many rated the slogan “ineffective” and “compelling.” The ratio indicates how many people may be “turned off” by the slogan for each person who finds it “compelling.”

The average score takes into account all three ratings and blends them into an overall score for the slogan.

The charts in this section rank order the tag lines according to the proportion who rated each as “compelling.”

It should also be noted that by the time the tag lines were presented participants had been discussing this topic for more than an hour. These reactions are therefore unlikely to be the same as if they were seeing the lines “cold.” By the same token, because they were well into the discussion, the response should summarize participant thinking about the topic - which is what a tag line should do.



## FAVORED TAG LINES STRESS RESPONSIBILITY, MONEY

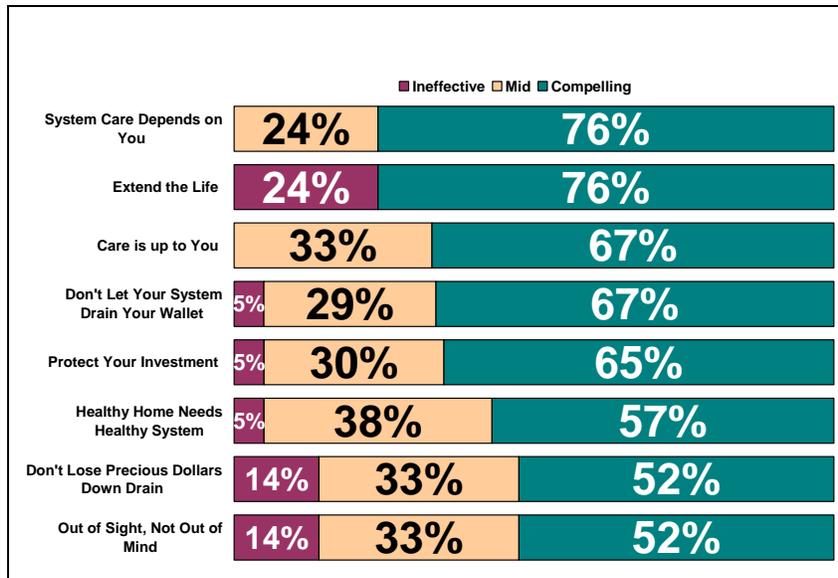
Participants gave the highest ratings for “effectiveness” to tag lines that directly focused on responsibility and saving money. Four slogans had average scores over 2.5, with 2/3 or more rating them “compelling.” These were:

- Septic System Care Depends on You [ average 2.8 / 76% compelling / 0 ineffective]
- Septic System Care Is Up to You [2.7 / 67% / 0 ineffective]
- Protect Your Investment [2.6 / 65% / 13:1 compelling-to-ineffective ratio]
- Don't Let Your Septic System Drain Your Wallet [2.6 / 67% / 13:1]

Four other slogans in the top tier had majorities rating them as “compelling,” but had lower average scores (2.0-2.5) and more detractors. These tended to focus on health, or less direct messages about responsibility or saving money. They were:

- Extend the Life of Your Septic System [2.5 average/ 76% compelling / 3:1 / one of the highest “compelling” and highest “ineffective” ratings in the list]
- A Healthy Home Needs A Healthy Septic System[ 2.5 / 57% / 11:1]
- Don't Lose Precious Dollars Down the Drain [2.4 / 52% / 4:1].
- Your Septic System Might be Out of Sight [2.4 / 52% / 4:1].

### Top Lines Focus on Responsibility and Savings



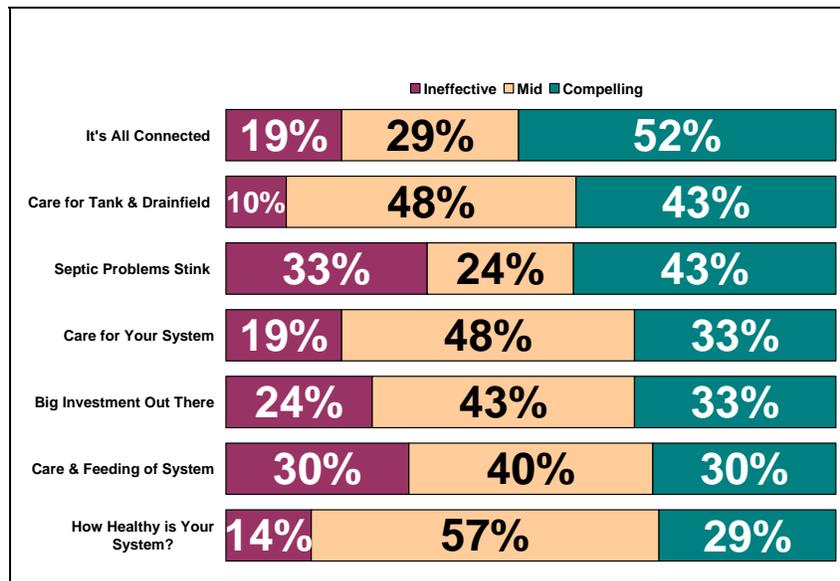
Question 12-33: Next are a series of slogans or tag lines that may go on these mailers, or you might see them on a bus sign or a poster. Rate each one, Ineffective = 1...2...3 = Compelling.



The next tier of tag lines had mid-range average scores and fewer than half the participants called them “compelling.” These included an environmental message, and messages about health and finances that were longer and less direct:

- Septic Systems and the Environment – Its all connected [2.3 / 52% / 5:2]
- Care for Your Septic Tank and Drainfield [2.3 / 43% / 4:1]
- Septic Problems Stink [2.1 / 43% / 4:3]
- Care for Your Septic System [2.1 / 33% / 3:2]
- You've Got a Big Investment Out There [2.1 / 33% / 4:3]
- The Care and Feeding of Your Septic System [2.0 / 30% / 1:1]
- How Healthy is Your Septic System? [2.1 / 29% / 2:1]

### Longer, Less Direct Lines Rate Some “Ineffective” Scores

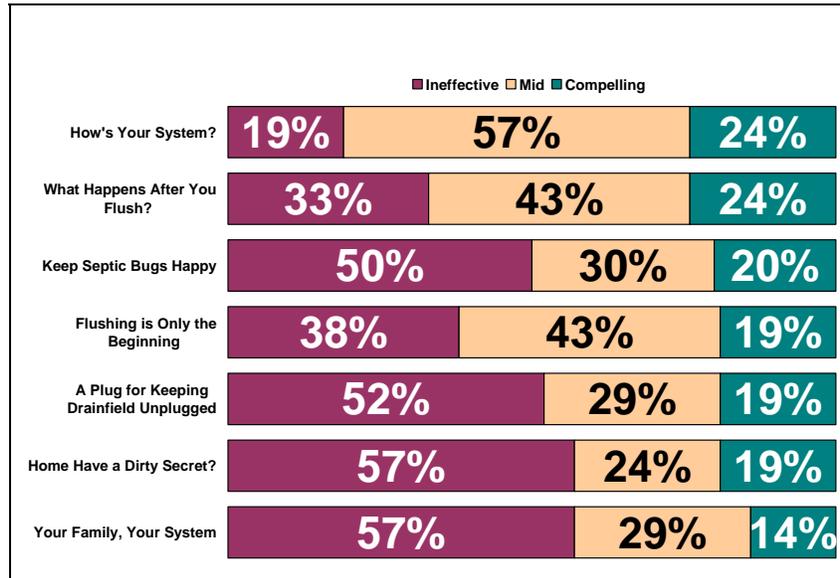


Consistent with their reactions to the mailers participants gave the lowest ratings to attempts at humor and the "Get the Connection?" line. The lowest-rated tag lines were:

- How's Your Septic System? [2.0 / 24% / 5:4]
- What Happens After You Flush? [1.9 / 24% / 3:4]
- Keep Your Septic Bugs Happy [1.7 / 20% / 2:5]
- Flushing is Only the Beginning [1.6 / 19% / 1:2]
- A Plug for Keeping Your Drainfield Unplugged [1.7 / 19% / 2:5]
- Does Your Home Have a Dirty Secret? [1.6 / 19% / 1:3]
- Your Family, Your Septic System. Get the Connection? [1.6 / 14% / 1:4]



### Humor and Long Lines In the Lowest Ratings



When asked after hearing the whole list which was their favorite and/or most memorable, there were mentions for “flushing is only beginning,” “draining your wallet,” “the environment one,” “septic care is up to you,” "your septic system care depends on you," and "money and ownership."

Some of the least favorites were said to be "dirty secret" and "the flush one."

### Rural Group Leaned More Toward Financial Messages

In general, the Rural group was more positive toward the messages than the Suburban. In particular, of the top tier of tag lines, the Rural group gave more “compelling” scores to the financial messages, including

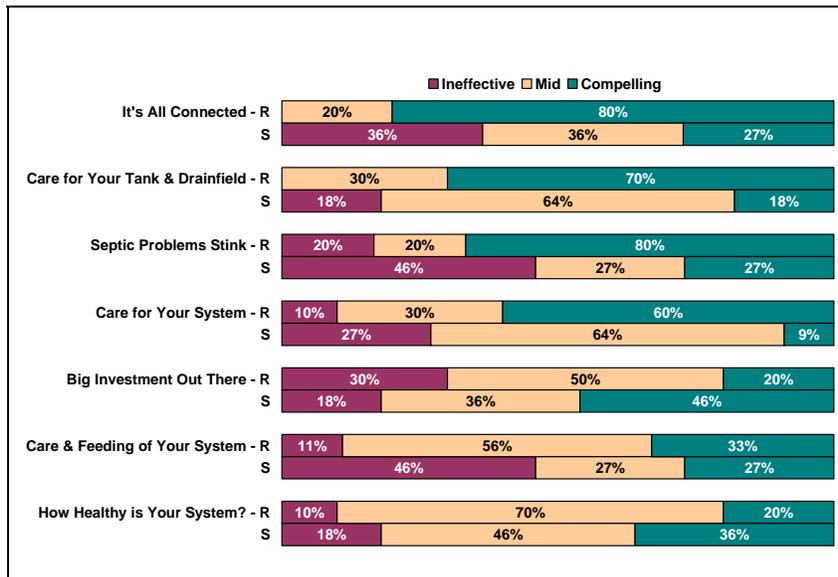
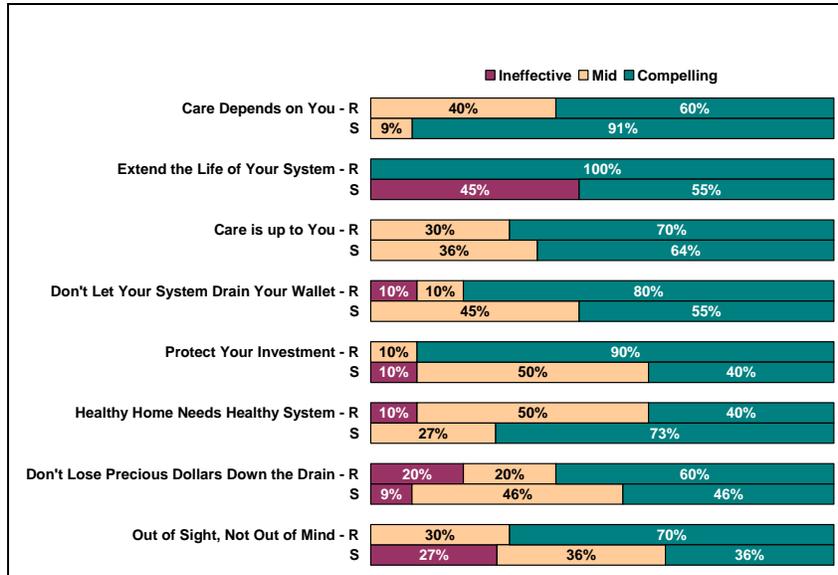
- Extend the Life of Your System (100% from Rural; 55% from Suburban),
- Don't Let Your System Drain Your Wallet (80% vs. 55%);
- Protect Your Investment (90% vs. 40%);
- Don't Lose Precious Dollars Down the Drain (60% vs. 46%).

Other lines that received more compelling ratings from the Rural group were:

- It's all connected (80% vs. 27%);
- Care for Your Tank and Drainfield (70% vs. 18%);
- Septic Problems Stink (80% vs. 27%); and
- Care for Your System (60% vs. 9%).



## Rural Group Gave More “Compelling” Ratings Overall

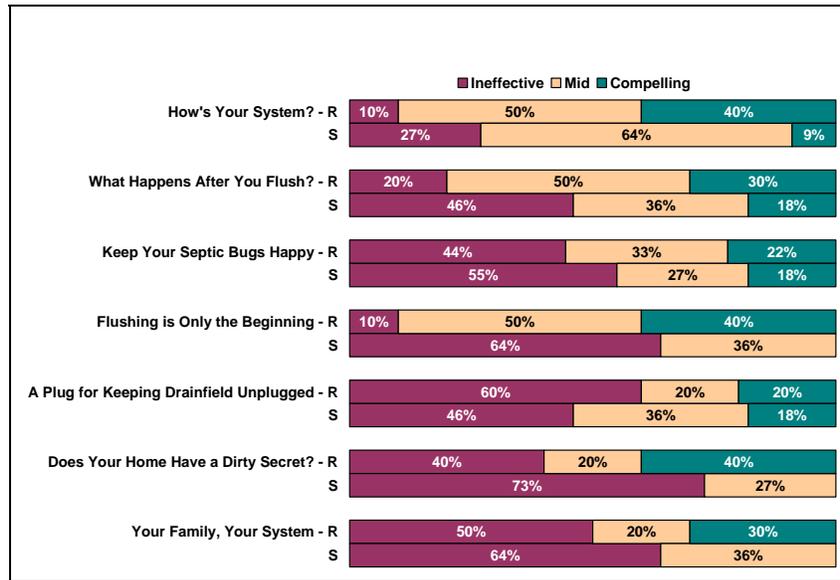


Conversely, several of the tag lines with the lowest ratings were brought down due to the “ineffective” scores from the Suburban group, including:

- What Happens After You Flush (46% “ineffective” from the Suburban group, vs. 20% for Rural);
- Flushing is Only the Beginning (64% vs. 10%); and
- Does Your Home Have a Dirty Secret? (73% vs. 40%).



## Many “Ineffective” Ratings Come from Suburbanites





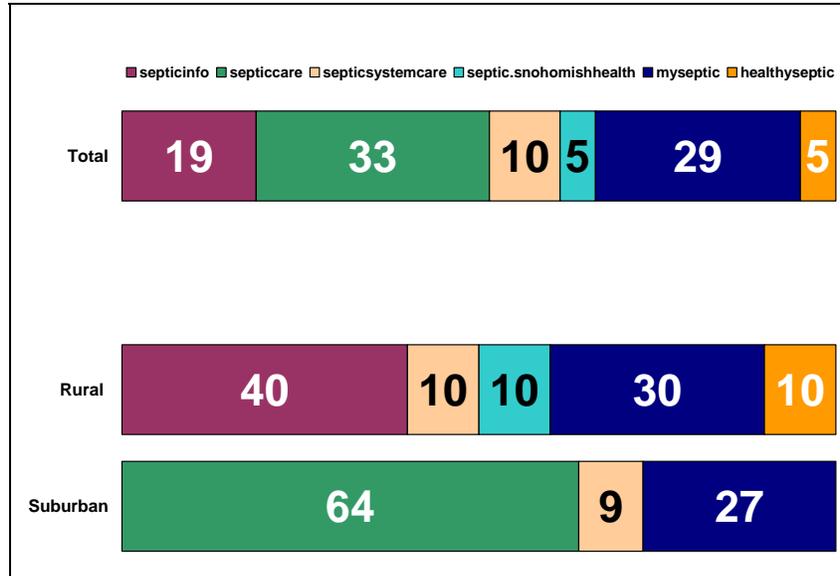
## WEBSITE ADDRESS

From a list of potential website addresses, the favorites were:

33% for “Septiccare.org;” consisting entirely of 64% from the Suburban group (it received no “favorite” votes from the Rural group);

29% for “MySeptic.org,” fairly evenly split between Rural (30%) and Suburban (27%).

### “MySeptic” Favored Equally Among Both Groups



Question 34: Here are possible website addresses, one will be selected to direct people to the program website and will be included on all mail pieces, posters, etc. Ideally the URL will describe the program and be easy to remember.

Shorter is clearly better with web addresses. "Myseptic" was called "easy to remember," but at least one participant thought it "corny." He didn't like the perceived play on "My Space."

"Septicinfo" lost some favor because "the letters run together," even though

*That just conveys whatever we're after, information about my septic system.*

Several people in each group were more concerned with which address would pop up easier with Google, indicating that they would never remember a specific address. Those more concerned with Google results put more stock in addresses that included "Snohomish," and started with "septic."

When asked specifically about ".org" addresses vs. ".info," ".org" was slightly favored, especially in the suburban group. One explained:

*"There are some really weird things you can get with 'info.'"*



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# DISCUSSION

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These focus groups lead to some clear indications that residents respond to a mix of messages about responsibility, financial savings, and health. Short, direct tag lines were preferred, and humor was seldom appreciated – a finding consistent with the forum and survey results. Residents were very particular about photos, insisting that they be local, and up-to-date in style. They liked the system diagram in particular, which was informative as well as catchy.

It is useful to be reminded of how little many know about their septic system. Terminology needs to be explained and it is dangerous to make assumptions about owners' awareness level. In that context, it made sense that participants frequently suggested that any materials should include how to find out more about one's own system.

Most striking, perhaps, was the negative response to allowing any "sanitarian" (a term to be avoided) or other county employee on to one's property. The residents in these groups were extremely suspicious and concerned about being roped into repairs, fines, system replacements, or other expenses.

Few participants seemed inclined to return the mailer card for more information or workshops/classes.

There was more positive reaction to the "BMP" handout. This too is consistent with previous research that factual information is most positively received. It could be that residents should simply be sent such instructions, with a place to check for more information, either in general, or about their own system. The tagline and website address could be introduced in that piece.





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# APPENDIX

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## I. WELCOME & GROUND RULES

- A. Purpose of meeting:**  
This is one of a series of meetings that we are convening in Snohomish County. Purpose is to talk about issues related to your households.
- B. Selection:**  
You were selected at random from households in Snohomish County that have septic systems.
- C. Format**
1. This is to be a group discussion.
  2. I will initiate topics and keep discussion on track.  
And make sure everyone is heard
  3. Challenging views welcome. Disagreement acceptable.
  4. Speak up. Don't withhold views or comments.
  5. Speak one at a time. I will call on you.
  6. You can ask each other questions.
  7. Note Taping System.
- D. Introduction of Participants:**
1. Name (first name)
  2. Occupation
  3. Where do you live?

## II. QUESTIONS / INTRODUCE KEY PADS

- A. Q1** How long have you lived with a septic system?  
[Note: over whole lifetime, not just their current system]
1. 2 yrs or less
  2. 2 to 4 years
  3. 5 to 9 years
  4. 10 to 19 years
  5. 20 years or more
  6. Not sure
- B. Q2** How old is your system?
1. 2 yrs or less
  2. 2 to 4 years
  3. 5 to 9 years
  4. 10 to 19 years
  5. 20 years or more
  6. Not sure
- C. Q3** Have you had repairs on your system?
1. Yes
  2. No

- D. **Q4** What type of system do you have?
1. All gravity distribution (no pump)
  2. Low pressure distribution (LPD)
  3. Sandfilter (with LPD or drip disposal)
  4. Aerobic treatment (with LPD or drip disposal)
  5. Other
  6. Nor Sure / Don't Know
- E. **Q5** How would you describe your knowledge of your septic system?
1. I'm well versed in its care and maintenance
  2. I pay attention to it off and on
  3. I don't give it much thought until something goes wrong
    - Probe Why did you answer "well-versed"  
Where did you learn about septic system care?

### III. BEHAVIORS

- A. Who would you call if something went wrong?
1. Probe Service Providers/Pumpers
    - How do you select a service provider or pumper?
  2. Probe Health District
    - Why would you call / not call Snohomish Health District

### IV. BMPs

- A. Here is a handout about caring for your septic system. It lists a number of things. For each category...
1. How realistic is that ?
    - Easy ...Difficult
    - Practical?
    - Effective?
    - Worth while?
    - Confusing?
- B. List of practices [ HANDOUT ]
1. Keep solids, toxics, oils and greases out of the drain
  2. Reduce and control water usage
  3. Perform tank pumping and maintenance
  4. Protect your drainfield and reserve areas
  5. Regularly inspect your drainfield
- C. Would you like to have this list as a reminder?
1. What format would be most useful to you?
    - Card (size)
    - Refrigerator magnet
  2. Where would you keep it?

**V. MAILERS [GROUP 1: A>D; GROUP 2 D>A]**

I am going to hand out some things that might arrive in the mail. Take a look it over and write down your reaction.

**A. [ "YOUR FAMILY" ]**

1. What was your overall reaction?
  - What did you like?
  - Anything put you off?
2. Address page
3. main inside page
4. mail back card
  - Would you send in for information
5. Back page
6. **Q6** KEYPAD: INEFFECTIVE = 1...2...3 = COMPELLING

**B. [ "UNDER THERE" ]**

1. What was your overall reaction?
  - What did you like?
  - Anything put you off?
2. Address page
3. main inside page
4. mail back card
  - Would you send in for information
5. Back page
6. **Q7** KEYPAD: INEFFECTIVE = 1...2...3 = COMPELLING

**C. [ "DOG & BOY" ]**

1. What was your overall reaction?
  - What did you like?
  - Anything put you off?
2. main inside page
3. Back page
4. **Q8** KEYPAD: INEFFECTIVE = 1...2...3 = COMPELLING

**D. [ "DRAINFIELD RODEO" ]**

1. What was your overall reaction?
  - What did you like?
  - Anything put you off?
2. main inside page
3. Back page
4. **Q9** KEYPAD: INEFFECTIVE = 1...2...3 = COMPELLING

**Q10: FAVORITE (1=A, 2=B, 3=C, 4=D)**

## VI. TAG LINES

- A. Next are a series of slogans or tag lines that may go on these mailers, or you might see them of a bus sign or a poster.
- B. Rate Each one. [ INDIVIDUALLY / DO NOT SPEAK ]
- INEFFECTIVE = 1...2...3 = COMPELLING
  - Discuss After Rating
- C. Present one at a time: **Q11– Q32** **GROUP 1: 10>32; GROUP 2: 32>10**
10. Care for your septic system
  11. How's your Septic System?
  12. Your family. Your septic system. Get the connection?
  13. Septic system care depends on you
  14. A healthy home needs a healthy septic system
  15. Does your home have a dirty secret?
  16. What happens after you flush?
  17. Don't lose precious dollars down the drain
  18. Protect your investment
  19. Keep your septic bugs happy
  20. Septic system care is up to you
  21. A plug for keeping your drainfield unplugged
  22. Care for your septic tank and drainfield.
  23. The care and feeding of your septic system
  24. Extend the life of your septic system
  25. Septic systems and the environment—it's all connected
  26. How healthy is your septic system?
  27. You've got a big investment out there
  28. Your septic system may be out of sight, but it shouldn't be out of mind.
  29. Don't let your septic system drain your wallet
  30. Flushing is only the beginning
  31. Septic problems stink
- D. What grabbed your attention the most in all these messages?
1. Which one did you like best? (why?)
  2. Which one will you remember tomorrow?
- E. Which one do you like best? Why

## VII. WEBSITE URLS

- A. [HANDOUT ] Here are a possible website addresses One will be selected direct people to the program website and will be included on all mail pieces, posters, etc. Ideally the URL will describe the program and be easy to remember.
- B. Handout List:
- GROUP 1: .org GROUP 2: .info**
1. www. septicinfo .org
  2. www. septichealth .org
  3. www. septiccare .org
  4. www. septicssystemcare .org
  5. www. septic.snohomishhealth .org
  6. www. myseptic .org
  7. www. mysepticssystem .org
  8. www. healthyseptic .org
  9. www. safeseptic .org
- C. **Q32** Which do you like best (Why?)
- D. **Q33** All of these “.org” addresses could instead use a “.info” ending. Which ending, “.org” or “.info” sounds more appealing and/or is easier to remember?
1. ORG
  2. INFO



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# TRANSCRIPTS

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The following are transcriptions made from the audio recording of the discussions. The transcription is meant as a guide and not necessarily a full and complete record of the discussions. Because this transcription was made after the fact by people unfamiliar with the project and who were not present at the discussion, plus variability in the quality of the recording, there are inevitable gaps and misspellings.



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**TRANSCRIPT**  
**Rural Septic System Owners Focus Group**  
**Snohomish County 23 June 09**

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**[MODERATOR: Welcome and Ground Rules]**

My name is Cheri Garnet. I live in Stanwood. My occupation is homemaker, I guess.

John Whitter. I live north of Monroe. And I was a community college teacher. I'm retired now.  
**What'd you teach, John?** Photography.

Tim Adams. I live north of Arlington, and my current status is unemployed.

I'm Nancy Biel and I live in Stanwood, and I haven't decided what I'm going to do.

[Laughter]

My name's Kathy Mosier and I'm a parapro for Marysville School District, but I'm on leave of absence taking care of a granddaughter right now, so I'm enjoying that. And I live in Arlington.

I'm Harry Sideburn and I'm a structural steel painter, retired. I painted 76 bridges here in Washington State. Deception Pass Bridge I painted twice. [Laughter] **Which one?** Deception Pass. Real nice scenery there. Every ten years you have to paint it because of the salt layer. And I had two chances to paint the Space Needle and I turned it down because I was making more money doing water tanks. Now, I wish I would have painted it just to say I painted the Space Needle.

Yeah, my name's Larry Nigly and I'm retired.

I'm Joan Dickinson. I live in Arlington, and I'm retired.

**Larry, where do you live?** Snohomish.

I'm Tina Severson and I live in Monroe and I teach preschool from home.

And I'm Sarah Lurvey and I live north of Arlington, and I do all sorts of stuff, but I work basically with a lawyer and manage her household and I do healthcare stuff, too.

**[MODERATOR: Introduce keypads.]**

How long have you lived with a septic system?

- 1 - 2 yrs or less
- 2 - 2 to 4 years
- 3 - 5 to 9 years
- 4 - 10 to 19 years
- 5 - 20 years or more
- 6 - Not sure

**So we have one at 2 to 4. Most of you it looks like -- Oh, I just went right by that, so I can't see it anymore, but most of you were a long time.**

**How old is your system?**

- 1 - 2 yrs or less
- 2 - 2 to 4 years
- 3 - 5 to 9 years
- 4 - 10 to 19 years
- 5 - 20 years or more
- 6 - Not sure

**Also long. Seven of you 20 years or more.**

Have you had repairs on your system?

1. Yes
2. No

That's not having it pumped or anything. That's just repairs, actual repairs? **Right.** Okay.

Well, I would say ours is more maintenance. I think you call that snaked and stuff and make sure [unintelligible].

The pumps, too, or just the system itself?

**Well, the whole system.**

Okay. Any repairs. **Any repairs to the tank or pumps, anything like that.**

So what would "no" be? Just nothing? **Well, no would [unintelligible] or, I mean, 2.**

**So it looks like three of you have had to have repairs.**

What type of system do you have?

1. All gravity distribution (no pump)
2. Low pressure distribution (LPD)
3. Sandfilter (with LPD or drip disposal)
4. Aerobic treatment (with LPD or drip disposal)
5. Other
6. Not sure / Don't know

**So we had three people with gravity, two people with low-pressure distribution, and two people with other. What were some of the other? No? Somebody had "other?"**

Mine was gravity.

**Or not sure. Three people were not sure. That's what it was, I'm sorry.**

Right. I think it's No. 2. I'm almost sure.

How would you describe your knowledge of your septic system?

1. I'm well versed in its care and maintenance
2. I pay attention to it off and on
3. I don't give it much thought until something goes wrong

**So four well-versed, five off and on, one --**

[Laughter]

**So particularly the people who said "well-versed," I guess I'm interested to know what that means to you. Why did you answer "well-versed?" What were the reasons? Anybody who answered that.**

I know how long it's supposed to be pumped or when it's supposed to be pumped. I try not to put garbage down it, because it's not [unintelligible] general, you know, and I make sure I don't have garbage on my dishes when I use the dishwasher, and I try not to use the washing machine more than just a couple of times maybe a day so that it doesn't get overflowing, you know, the too much water in the tank. And, let's see, what else? That's all I can think of.

**Anybody else?**

Mine was mostly, like with her, I know that it needs to be pumped, like, every three to five years, and I know that it's better to use liquid detergent versus the powder stuff. We don't have a garbage disposal, and I make sure my dishes are cleaned off good before I put it in the dishwasher, too.

We don't have a dishwasher.

**How do you all learn about the care and maintenance of your septic system? Where do you get the information?**

Mostly by word of mouth.

Word of mouth and working on it yourself.

**One at a time, please. So Larry? Word of mouth. And that is who? Whose mouth?** From the guy that -- well, I used to be a plumber pipefitter, so I did a lot of that myself, and... **The guys you worked with.** Yeah, then I talked to the guy that was pumping the tanks and stuff like that, and then do some of the maintenance myself.

There's classes you can take, too.

**And you mentioned the installer or the...** The septic guy, yeah, the guy that came and pumped had told us a lot of care for...

I used to have a friend who did that for a living.

I helped my buddy clean out his sewer system in Briar, and we took a ball that big of detergent. We had to split it up with a spade to get it out of the manhole.

Oh, yeah, that was powder detergent?

Yeah. // Yeah. // Interesting.

**Who would you call if something went wrong?**

The septic pump cleaner person.

Yeah, the septic guy.

**You have one that you typically use, and would you know right away?**

Well, I'm the one that's lived in the house two to four years. I'm in a newer home, and since I have the preschool and X amount of people in my home, four people plus the children, I would just want to maintain it and have it cleaned. But I didn't know anything about the powder stuff, and we did end up getting a video when we first moved in our home, but we didn't watch it, of course, so I basically actually did meet with the Snohomish Health Department and they showed me the layout of how our septic looks, because that was determining how many people could use it. And the only thing I'm cross-referencing is the fact that with newer appliances in our newer home, they recommend you use powder, but now I'm hearing this information and I'll go back to liquid detergent, so yeah, just that type of information, different sources.

**Okay. So a lot of different sources. Anybody else?**

I would use Ace Acme, simply because it's a local company that I've dealt with in the past. **Have they done work or pumped your...** They've pumped our septic system a couple of times, yes.

We use Cuz Concrete, because they've always done ours. And that's local.

That's who we use, too. And they put in our system.

**So most of the ones I hear are you call the companies that...**

Are local. // Are local, yes.

**Would anybody call anyone else other than the companies that...**

Probably something [unintelligible].

Check it out first, probably, and then go from there.

First of all [unintelligible].

**See what it is. So then, depending on...**

[Unintelligible].

**Right. So then, depending on what's going on, you might call different people at that point?**

The one I'd probably call would be Sultan Septic, I think. That's the one I use.

That's what I use. Uh-huh, that's what I use.

But, yeah, if it was backing up or something, then I would probably call them. But if it was backing up inside the house, I'd probably try and figure out if it was plugged up somewhere.

So are you talking about if your drain field plugs up? **Yeah. Anything. The system is the whole thing.** Right. Well, then you'd have to call whoever would do that.

Probably a plumber for the inside.

Yeah, hopefully the county wouldn't find out. **Hopefully what?** I said hopefully the county wouldn't find out, because then they'd have their nose in it.

**I mentioned before that we've done a series of these, and the topic has come up before, so I want to kind of probe it here, and it related to what you just said, Nancy. And that is, would you call the county or would you not call the county?**

I think that the septic person has to notify the county if they have a problem. Yeah. **Uh-huh. But that's not what you would call. You'd rely on...** Well, I wouldn't call him first. I would see if I could fix it.

Run away.

[Unintelligible -- cross-talk]

As a homeowner, I would call the septic system first, and I would not call the county.

I would not.

**Excuse me, what was that?**

I said if you called the county, then they'd send their guys out there, and they would really set you up with a fine system.

\$20,000 or \$30,000 or something.

**What about the Snohomish Health District? Anybody? You'd mentioned you had some information.**

Yeah, I had someone come out and they can look up what you have. And, I mean, they gave me information just not to exceed, you know, how many people are using everything and as far as the restroom and the water. And, I mean, they said that it was a newer system, but I did take it pretty serious. I'm not exceeding what the allotment of people should be in the home. But as far as all the other details, I didn't get too many other details. I mean, they probably assumed I already knew how to run my septic and stuff and how to take care of it.

**So if you wanted information like that -- don't let me put words in your mouth -- but what I heard before is if I wanted information I might call the health department. If something was wrong, I would not.**

Well, if you've got sewage leaking out, doesn't the health department get involved in that if your septic is -- I mean, I don't know. I'm just thinking that if you had a fluid coming from your system that that's not good.

And if it backs up in your house, you are not covered for flood. That is considered flood.

[Unintelligible] being covered by flood. How are they still selling that insurance?

[Laughter]

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Or actually, it's not covered by your homeowners. You would have to have flood insurance to cover it.

But if a pipe breaks in your house, you're covered by homeowners.

Right, but your septic and sewer is not considered that.

**So basically, if something goes wrong, you'd call the people who have maintained it.**

Yeah. [several]

Who do the work.

**And if there's something more serious, they're going to deal with it. I mean, they would have to notify the county if it was something serious that the county had to be notified about. And if it was a health issue, they would -- I'm trying to paraphrase and sum up, but again, don't let me say anything that's wrong.**

**You would be relying on your maintenance people to deal with the --**

For major problems, probably yeah.

I think they could tell you what your problem was, and then you'd have your options as to what you needed to do. **Yeah, like move away.**

[Laughter]

You can't even do that without having it repaired.

So long does your backyard hold all that really good stuff? I mean, where does it all go I guess is my question now that you guys have got me thinking. You got answers for that?

I'm going to say my trees are eating it, because they are fabulously green and they've broken through the system twice. We had to ditch witch and get the roots out of there, and they just love it.

So keep trees away from it, basically.

Definitely keep trees away.

Yeah, keep the trees away from it.

You don't want roots growing in your --

Is that near the tank heads or just anywhere out --

The drain field. [Several]

I have trees pretty much around the house, so there wasn't too many places you could put it.

Thank you. That covers the video that I didn't watch.

[Laughter]

Well, you can tell when they've done it, because all of a sudden you're noticing, these seem a lot greener over there. And then you get your water bill and it's huge.

**[MODERATOR: Distributes handout]**

Keep solids, toxics, oils, and greases out of the drain How realistic is that? 1. Easy ... Difficult 2. Practical? 3. Effective? 4. Worthwhile? 5. Confusing?
---

Some things don't even seem like normal that you'd put down a drain. **You wouldn't, anyway.**

They're just things that you automatically do. Like you never get things that can't deal with the septic system.

The whole powder thing I didn't know, and I had that appliance man, like I said, with our new appliances, he said that it ran more efficiently with powder, so now I know to just go back to the opposite. I don't need to have a powder. I'll use the liquid.

I would question the liquid drain cleaners, because there are those that say they are safe for septic systems.

Right. And you're not really sure if they're just trying to sell their product or if it's really going to be safe for your system. Like, Drain-O or something, I wouldn't put it down there.

Where do you dispose of the bleach, then, because I use bleach, like, every day, mixed with water, you know, for our sanitizer? So I've always dumped it down the sink, but it's pretty diluted. I mean, it's like a teaspoon of bleach with a bunch of water. But over time that would be a lot of bleach putting down the drain. So you just dump it outside or something? **So the question you have is where to put that. One of the reasons that they hire me to do this is because I don't know any of these things.** [Laughter] **So I can be real objective.** You have city sewer, huh? **I record the questions and nod and say, "That's a good question," but I don't have any of the answers. But I do want to know what your questions and confusions are about this.** I was told one time you can put, like, the person actually that built our home said every now and then throw something down the garbage disposal, like a piece of cabbage or something, because it'll rot and it'll cause -- I do remember him saying that. Does that work or no? Do you do that?

I've heard that garbage disposals are not good for septic. That's what I've heard.

Right, that's what I heard, too.

Yeah, it's not technically a garbage disposal, because you're not supposed to put anything down it. You know, he said to throw something every now and then, just so there's something rotting, I guess, to make bacteria thrive.

So he's using bacteria theory.

Yeah. [several]

Well, there should be bacteria in there.

Enough of it already.

Yeah. It should be working.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

**Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.**

Sorry.

**See, this always happens. I've got to keep everybody on the same conversation. So one at a time, please. It's very natural. So anything else about that one category there? It seems pretty straightforward to people and the list is good and... Pretty good. ...not very confusing or anything?**

I think medications is something that people don't think about a lot, because I think people that are on sewer where years back they used to tell them to toss it down the toilet. Well, they have to go through all these treatments now and it doesn't get a lot of that when you've got all kinds of medicines and stuff in there. So I think you're supposed to actually take it to a pharmacy and ask them to dispose that.

And so, the reason for not putting it in the septic tank is because it kills bacteria?

No, it poisons the ground because of the medication. And whatever other stuff is that you have pumped from your septic goes to wherever they take...

The treatment plant.

...the treatment plant is going to affect wherever it goes.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

I've often wondered, you know how most all of the hand soaps these days are antibacterial. Well, what does that do to the bacteria in your septic tank?

Well, the septic man said it was okay. I asked him that same question. He said you can use it every now and then. The Sultan Septic person said that.

I put yeast down the drain, and that creates -- it gives the bacteria something to eat.

<p>Reduce and control water usage How realistic is that? 1. Easy ... Difficult 2. Practical? 3. Effective? 4. Worthwhile? 5. Confusing?</p>
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**Same questions. Are these practical things that they're telling you here? Are they...**

I would say so, yeah.

**Are they effective? Are they worthwhile doing? Are they a pain in the neck?**

I never buy a low-flow toilet. It would make more sense to put a brick or something in it than to try to get those toilets to flush.

Low-flows aren't great. I use those [unintelligible] 20 flushes.

They're supposed to save you money by, you know, when you flush. But if you're flushing and flushing, how is it saving you money? Because you flush four times now trying to get it to go somewhere. **So that one, maybe not so...** Yeah, that's not saving me money. **...not so effective. Okay.**

I think the most important one is No. 2, fix leaks. Well, if there's a leak, I mean, the gallons can add up so fast. So fast. And it cost -- Yeah. We've had that happen.

And the right kind of toilet paper. Like, I think I was told you had to use the right kind of toilet paper, too. I don't know if that's on there. I didn't read far enough down. Right? Don't you have to use septic-safe toilet paper or something? I mean, most toilet paper says it on there, but I didn't, like, really check all the toilet paper. **That would be up on the top box there. It just says "excessive toilet paper."**

**So reduce and control water usage, you think, except for the possibility of the low-flow toilets, these are practical suggestions?**

Yeah. [Several]

**They're worthwhile? They're effective? But we're not sure about the low-flow toilet.**

Anybody else use one or agree?

No, but I have a comment about the space the laundry throughout the week. We have Cuz come out and do our septic systems for the pumping, and he recommended that you wait a couple of hours between your laundry loads, because the water is pumped out with such force that it doesn't always have a chance to settle. It churns everything up and then it sloshes over into the second compartment or so. That's what he said, anyways. And it's kind of a pain in the rear.

Right, because when they're in washing mode, you want to get it done.

<p>Perform tank pumping and maintenance How realistic is that? 1. Easy ... Difficult 2. Practical? 3. Effective? 4. Worthwhile? 5. Confusing?</p>
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They're easy to do, but I definitely don't do that every six months to three years.

Yeah.

I do it on an average three four years... // Yeah. // ...but only as far as having it pumped, but I don't have somebody come out and inspect it. I just call them up and have them come up and drain it or, you know, pump it out.

Yeah.

I don't even know if they have an outlet screen.

Yeah, I don't know about that, either.

I think they're talking about the more modern systems.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Mine's gravity, so I just let that take care of itself, basically. And I don't put no additives in there for the tank or anything. A lot of them tell you to do.

I've never done it, either. Never put anything in there. **Never done what?** Put additives in, chemicals for to biodegrade or what have you.

**Is the message clear? What they're trying to tell you here?**

Oh, yeah. // Uh-huh.

**From a communication standpoint, it's clear and...**

Definitely, yeah.

I definitely think it's what you hear from everybody, that every three years you should have your system inspected and pumped.

**Yeah, and we're finding that maybe... Maybe. ...people are not quite that religious about it.**

No. I think that's the message you hear. It's not necessarily what I do.

**Some are and some aren't.**

And I'm required, because I have to show proof. I have to send mine to my licensor to show her that I'm maintaining it.

And with our family, there's just the two of us...

Yeah, we're just two.

...and it doesn't need it every three years.

[Laughter]

I think it depends on the type of system you have, too. And how many people are using it.

The amount of people does. That's the main effect on your system.

Protect your drainfield and reserve areas How realistic is that? 1. Easy ... Difficult 2. Practical? 3. Effective? 4. Worthwhile? 5. Confusing?
---

Yeah, I see nothing wrong with that. That's common sense.

Yeah, yeah, everybody knows that.

But I know they put the drainfield right where I wanted to put some landscaping.

Yeah, yeah.

Mine's in, like, the middle of our yard. You know, you can look right at it. The three flat lids. So when it says keep irrigation and sprinkler systems away, does that mean you don't even water near there? Because I've got the brown box shapes around each of my septic tank covers. And my licensor said...

I think they're talking about underground sprinklers.

Oh, underground, okay. Thank you.

Well, it doesn't say underground, so I was just double-checking.

I know, but I think that's what they mean.

That makes sense.

Yeah, because you can throw one of those sprinklers [unintelligible]...

You can water around it and stuff.

Well, they say that for every drainfield, I've read, that for every drainfield you have on your place that you have to have a reserve area in case it fails.

I never heard that.

I haven't, either.

Well, I read that.

You might have read that.

A second place to put it?

Yeah, if you're -- It's so -- Yeah, you have to have an area.

Maybe on the newer systems maybe.

Well, no, this was -- I think that said that on my as-built, and I've been there since '73, so yeah. So I don't know. It seems odd to me when you have a -- if you have a small lot, you know, but that's what it said.

Regularly inspect your drainfield How realistic is that? 1. Easy ... Difficult 2. Practical? 3. Effective? 4. Worthwhile? 5. Confusing?
---

### **Is it clear what you're supposed to do?**

Yeah.

Yeah, that made me remember we did have an issue, because ours was a newer home when they built it. There was a crack, I think, and the rocks weren't put in right, so we did end up having an issue, because we had a nice puddle and we didn't realize what -- we'd never had septic before, so [unintelligible] of water. It didn't look like anything else. So, yeah, we had to dig it out and everything and fix it, but the homeowner didn't pay for it to have it done or anything. Or not homeowner. I'm the homeowner. The builder. And we were only in there for, like, a year and a half when it happened.

On the bottom, if the ports continually contain over six inches of water, there may be a problem. Where we live, even though we're on a hill, we have a very high water table. If you were to dig out the system during the wintertime, when we have some of these torrential rains and everything. It would be covered.

It'd be underwater.

Yeah, it was late fall when we had a garage built and he was digging holes to put the pilings in. By the time he got the second hole dug, the first one was full of water.

How did you get your house built?

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

**Okay. What about this whole piece now. Would this format -- would this be useful for you to have this piece of paper?**

Uh-huh, the size of it and everything, yeah.

**I was going to ask about the size.**

It's perfect.

Uh-huh. // Yeah. // Yes. // Uh-huh, yeah.

**If you got this, where would you keep it?**

In the laundry room. // Uh-huh.

Laundry room or garage.

**Anywhere else?**

Garage, possibly. // Garage, yeah.

**Or like a Post-It or...**

Yeah. // Yeah.

I probably wouldn't keep it. If I wanted to look at it, I would just go on the internet and find it. At all these www dot [unintelligible].

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

You know, if you had a car and had as much trouble with it...

Laminate it.

...as you have with computers, you'd run them over a cliff.

I love computers, though.

**It sounds like this is pretty convenient. I mean, this could be smaller.**

It could be. It could even be a magnet on the fridge.

You'd have to be able to read it.

**So if it were a refrigerator magnet, first of all, it'd have to be smaller than this, right?**

Not necessarily. I've gotten magnets that are big.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

I don't think I'd put this on my refrigerator.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

**So a card wouldn't be bad, but I'm hearing you kind of like this size.**

Tape them to the inside of a cupboard door.

But it's a good reminder, because if you have kids and other people in your household that may forget, just using a lot of toilet paper, that's just a normal thing I think other than the other things that doesn't seem very common to stick things down the drain, but a lot of toilet paper. And then, the laundry part. Just reminders, you know, because people forget. You get in everyday life and you forget things, so I would highlight the things that are the most common things that we would do on accident, put something down the drain, like oils or something like that.

I would just use the bottom line on the card. If you're going to have it on a magnet.

There should be an 800-number.

Well, you can call the [unintelligible].

But, you know, you could also make like a caring for your home type of file, and things, you know, people actually do that, like how...

Things that need to stay, instruction books that stay with the house...

Yes, that you don't want to get rid of, exactly.

...when you move.

Exactly. I mean, because you don't get rid of those things, so you can't, you know, and this is something that is really important, because it would probably, like you said, cost a lot of money in the long run, so the more educated we are the more that we would take this more serious.

[Unintelligible] in the laundry room. I've got the drainfield, the septic tank, the cleanout hose and everything else about a foot each measured from the house [unintelligible] in the laundry room.

And that's not a bad area.

Yeah. [several]

**I've got some other things to show you.**

We're having some problems with our lake about the septic, out there at Lake Ketchum. And I don't know what they're doing about that. Some of them I think they said their septic leaked into the lake, and then...

I think that's in a lot of places.

Yeah, it's like, um, excuse me. [Unintelligible] that's why. So we can use it.

Having to replace it is what they're going to make you do.

Don't swim. Don't even think about it...

Well, look what they're doing out at [unintelligible] right now.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Well, a place like that, when you're in a confined space, you have to control your sewage runoff and stuff.

**[MODERATOR: Distributes handout]**

So this is what they're charging the money on your taxes for, huh? The Snohomish County surface water management? **To do what?** Oh, on your property tax, you're charged for surface water management. You're charged so much every year for that. And I see here that this is a pamphlet that they're handing out.

[Unintelligible] know where our taxes are going to.

Return this card to receive a free visit from Snohomish -- No, I'm not going to.

Yeah. Nobody would. You'd have to be crazy.

What is a sanitary...

Probably the newer home people would, because they wouldn't want to -- maybe know how to maintain it. But maybe in an older home-type situation, you don't want them in your business, you don't want them going and checking stuff out, because you don't want to have -- which makes sense. I mean, [unintelligible] has issues, but in this case, like, you don't even know how to maintain it. It's probably at least good, even if you have to put some basic facts on here, it would be probably kind of handy on a postcard. It'd probably be, you know, that jumps out of them, learn more facts by having someone visit you type of thing.

**Any other sort of overall reactions to this?**

It seems to me whoever you're getting this information for that there's getting ready to set Snohomish County up, like [unintelligible] Island where they have mandatory septic inspections. **And they don't have them in Snohomish County now?**

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

This is after the initial permit we're talking about? **I don't know.** Because when you're building, you do have to go through all of that [unintelligible] and everything else.

Right. That's just like they put a meter on my well. And I said, "Well, if you come out and put a meter on my well, I've got my shotgun loaded." I said, "Where the heck were you guys when I had to lay out over \$4,000 to dig that well?" I said, "I don't need a meter on my well."

Yeah, if you to dig your own thing, pretty much. I got a [unintelligible] for Mother's Day, you know, years ago, but yeah, they had to go out there and dig it by hand out the road. Some yokel come out. He wanted to charge us an unbelievable amount. I was like, "No, we've got a pickaxe, thank you."

Yeah, my mother- and father-in-law live in that type of situation off the Ben Howard in Monroe, and they had to dig their own for the water source and everything. So it's a totally different situation.

You do all your own maintenance.

Yeah, it's a lot of work.

You know, you're pretty much, you are the homeowner now.

Well, one thing, when you do have your own well, or with our situation we're on a community well, but you really have to -- the person that does your well has to be up-to-date, because if you're -- we looked into having one dug for our own property rather than the community well, and there were a number of restrictions. It can't be anywhere near your septic.

Yeah, you've got to be so many feet away from it.

Right. Livestock, anything like that... // Yeah. // ...and, of course, the location, sure, I've got all this area, but this is where my water is. Well, this is right where the neighbor has his barn, and you know?

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

**I want to get us back to this mailer. So if this came in your mail, what would you do with it?**

Throw it away.

[Unintelligible].

Recycle it.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

**Does the picture... It's a nice picture. ...grab your attention?**

Yeah, I think so.

It kind of looks like an old-style picture a little bit. Kind of an older-style family. I don't know. It looks almost like a '70s family. Doesn't it kind of?

Yeah.

To me, the message on the inside seems to kind of be a scare tactic. It says, "A failing septic system is a serious risk to your family and pets." That, to me, is just coming across like: You don't know how to take care of yourself. Snohomish County Surface Water Management would be happy to help you.

It's interesting, the different perspectives.

No, I got his perspective.

I was just looking at it going, okay, well, the person that doesn't know -- like, you guys all know about your septic -- would just say, okay, well, what could happen? You know, like what could happen?

Well, a lot of those points I don't think...

It would give them at least an idea of what to ex -- you know, what their -- to point out...

I think that my opinion is that if the county wants to spend money they should do it on educating people on how to use and maintain their septic system, and not scaring people that you're putting your family at risk if you're one of the 7,000 to 8,000 homes that rely on septic systems.

I think it's probably good, though, just for people that don't know that that's an option that they have to get information, so if you had a card that had the website and stuff, then that'd give you a good way to start to check out something.

That's totally good right there, because, like, if you're a person that would just end up calling somebody and spending money doing that, you get to have a free resource that would come. You know, we're paying our tax dollars for that, so that would be a free resources.

And that's true, because you have to watch. Even if you do call somebody, you never know when they're going to take advantage of you, for like somebody who's a little older and things like that, or a female or things like that.

Or they just need to make a quota.

I'd say this would be good in some -- for a lot of people that -- probably a lot of people that are maybe just moving out into the country or that are new and don't know much about their systems and stuff, yeah.

**I want to be clear. When you were saying about someone taking advantage of you, so the county would be someone who would not...**

No. I would say...

Yes, exactly.

...I would say the county wouldn't necessarily...

**So the county is somebody who won't. Okay.**

Yeah, exactly. Instead of calling that maintenance person.

They might tell you that now you have to have a new system put in or something like that, but I don't think the county would take advantage and things like that.

But as far as...

Because they're not getting anything, right?

...I think my husband's and my reaction would be, "This is fine. But if it's not broken, don't fix it." Because I think once you get the county in, they've got an in, they know everything about you, "Well, you've got to do this. You've got to do this." // Uh-huh. // And you have to have a permit to do it. // Yeah. // And it's ridiculous.

[Unintelligible] some stuff and fixing your -- you've got to have a permit for that.

**So to kind of again summarize -- but I want you to correct me or modify -- you would probably open this if it came on your way to recycling, it sounds like. The picture's a little bit dated, maybe, old-timey. How about the saying on the front? Does that mean anything?**

I liked that part. **You did? Okay.** Yeah.

**Inside may be more useful for people who are new to septic or might not know. Some negative reaction to scare tactics, serious risk to your family, and again I'm hearing kind of a general idea that the county health district could be a good place for information, but you really don't want them out looking around your property.**

You don't want them taking the next steps saying what you got...

We don't want them in our business.

...that you don't want them telling you now you have a stipulation or else you're going to have this, this, or that happen. You want more coming in with friendly, helpful information and giving you the option to make the choice, pretty much.

Right. Because I'm talking...

[Unintelligible] and someone else come out after that.

...especially in our situation, we have a system that's over 20 years old, and I would guess the sanitarian who's going to come out may or may not even be that old themselves...

[Laughter]

...they're going to look at my system and say, "This antique needs to be updated."

Yeah, which makes sense. That's a lot of money.

[Unintelligible] in your shoes to know how much that's going to cost or does that make sense.

Right. And...

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

This is not very informative and any homeowner has quite a responsibility themselves just becoming informed about every aspect of their operation.

Yeah, there's a lot of things.

**Good, all right. I heard some comments when it first came out, but how many would be likely to send in the card?**

No. [Several]

**Anybody?**

If I hadn't known about them previously, I might have...

And I might have, too...

...just to get more information.

...just to get more information, as well.

Because you want to do anything you can to keep your septic -- you want it to last forever.

[Unintelligible] and taking good care of it the best I can.

Well, the classes and workshops is a nice option, too, for people that really do want to learn. I mean, they do have the option that if you want information, here's the classes and workshops to learn. So that's nice, too.

You can Google to get information, too.

And, like, even for me, like, I wouldn't have known how many people were allowed to even, you know, be in my home using -- I mean, I could have moved in -- four bedroom plus bonus room, I could have moved in with a couple of other families, and we'd never known how many people you could actually have in your home. And watch the video, probably, huh? Maybe it would tell me.

[Laughter]

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

**[Unintelligible] this would be the front page, with your address on it, with a little picture of another family, saying an important message for owners of a septic system. Any reaction to that one way or the other?**

That's fine.

**Does that make you want to open it [unintelligible]?**

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, the family right there? That's a good picture of them. That one looks a little newer, the picture.

[Laughter]

It does. No, I mean...

It's nicer.

I get what you're saying, yes.

I'm not saying that that family -- but it just has, like, an older-style look to it. Even the girl with the little kind of bun going on in the front and the [unintelligible], you know?

[Laughter]

I don't know. I'm just giving picture opinions. I used to do a lot of marketing and stuff. I mean, in the business world, when I worked in the business world, I'm not in there anymore.

**[MODERATOR: Mailer grading instructions]**

YOUR FAMILY	
1. Ineffective	4
2. ...	4
3. Compelling	2

**We've got four ineffective, four in the middle, and two thought it was compelling.**

**So let's see, I have another one.**

This picture would look more like these two grandparents and this child in today's society.

Exactly.

**[Unintelligible].**

I like this one.

This one's cute.

I agree with this picture. Septic system repair is up to you, and it might cost you a bunch of money, so take care of it.

Has the county had a whole lot of trouble with this? **With what?** With inadequate septic systems. **You know, I don't know, but it's all this Puget Sound cleanup and...**

Yeah. It's got a lot to do with that.

I think they've been somewhat affected by our place, because they've had some problems with septic systems leaking into the lake, so I don't know if they find those homeowners or -- because I know they were cleaning it up. That much is, you know, scuttlebutt in the neighborhood, oh, they're cleaning that up, don't worry about that. You know, what happened to the homeowners I'm not exactly sure. I know some people didn't move.

**So let's walk through this one here. It comes this way. It'll have your name on there. And there's our different family. Septic system care is up to you. So would that compel you to open that up or no?**

I would say yes.

Yeah. [Several]

I would be more interested in this one than that.

I would open it just because I'd want to see what Snohomish County was...

Yeah.

**Tim, what makes this one more inviting than the other one?**

Just I'm not particularly impressed with important messages that come to me from the county. Something that tells me that caring for my septic system is up to me, that's more interesting. **A little less pushy? A little less invasive.**

**So we'll open it up and then you've got...**

I like the little picture there. I mean, I think that...

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

...really going on in there.

**What is it there about it that grabbed you?** Well, I like seeing the drainfield and all of it, and getting, you know, even the little stethoscope, the idea of is it in good shape or is it in bad shape? Keep an eye on it, you know? Pay attention. I like that. **Okay. So it conveyed the message.**

The appliances that are right there that come from it, too. **What's that? Excuse me?** You can see the -- I mean, I didn't catch it right away until she was talking like that with the little doctor thing, but you see what's connected to it and how it all runs through. The toilet and the washer/dryer probably is important to maybe highlight that a little more, because it is a part of what's causing everything else to function.

And most people think of septic tank, but how many of them really think about the drainfield. **The whole system.**

Yeah, the whole system and that connection to it all.

I think a lot of these have probably got to do with they're trying to get things going because they're putting a lot of cluster housing in rural areas now, and they're going to have to monitor the contaminate from more houses being built more compact together in the rural area.

I'd like to vote against that. Just quit doing that tract housing. It's a blight on the land.

That might be what they're trying to get out there and get people to make sure that they keep good track of their septic systems and stuff.

That's a good point, because there's a lot of that.

Because they're building a lot of those communities now.

A lot.

A lot of them are going in.

**Would anything else about this picture in here that you like or dislike, or anything put you off about it?**

Well, I like the very first thing they said is, "Has your septic system had a checkup recently?" So, I mean, right away it grabs your attention to think. You know, have you thought about your septic system lately? Most people, until something goes wrong, don't think about it.

Right. // That's true. // Right.

And it's not judgmental at all, either. It's just like...

Yeah, it's just, "Have you thought about it?"

Maybe the stethoscope is a little [unintelligible].

[Laughter]

**We have some people who like it here.**

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

I would put something in there like just for people that are money conscientious that they should maybe say, you know, like there's free options of getting information, just something, you know, not -- I don't know. Does that matter? Like, when you're looking at something, you want to know what's that going to lead to. Like, you don't know if they're going to charge or not, if you don't know about what the health department offers and stuff, so they don't know what's going to happen, so maybe something that just gives them information that it's not going to cost them anything, regardless.

**Right. Let's go to the picture on the back. Did you notice that as you were going through?**

Yeah. That's really good. // Yeah. // Compared to the other one, way better. // Yeah.

And it makes you think, too, the kids are on the grass above the septic. That would [unintelligible]. Are they playing in feces or what?

That's a good one.

**Would there be any difference in your likelihood of sending the card back for this one versus the one we just saw earlier?**

Yes. [Several]

**You'd be more likely to or it doesn't make any difference?**

Well, they're exactly the same questions, but the whole feeling of the card is much less threatening.

The concept part of it. // Yeah. // Yeah. **What's that?** The concept of it. They don't push it right in your face. They kind of sneak up behind you.

[Laughter]

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

This picture actually looks more like a park versus like an actual -- I know rural, you guys live in all the rural areas and probably have way more acres than I do. I only have half an acre, but I mean this looks like you're visiting a park. This one looks like your actual home lawn. You know, you should have something in the background like a ball or something on the ground in the background that makes it look like a backyard.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Yeah, exactly.

**Well, let's vote on this one, then.**

UNDER THERE	
1. Ineffective	0
2. ...	6
3. Compelling	4

**So all 2s and 3s on this one. Six 2s and four 3s. Okay.**

**I have more. We're going to fill up your mailbox.**

**Same thing, we'll start with the address page.**

It's outdated, so it'd need an updated picture, because they're wearing '70s/'80s clothing in that picture. I mean, it's coming back in style but people will know [unintelligible]. I mean, it could blend, but you've got the little guy with his really, you know, that doesn't matter. It actually looks like, you know, Michael J. Fox's family back in the days, something like that, I guess.

Back to the future.

There you go. Now everything you predicted is coming true. You can [unintelligible] and everything, right?

**So this one has a different message.**

This, to me, tells me like a person that's more thinking on the money end, which would be not on either, but the one that's going to be conscientious of things that cost and... **Oh, are you inside now?** ...expenses -- the little box there.

**Let me ask first about this is a different message than the other two, underneath the picture on the mailer face.**

It's the same as...

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Septic System Care is up to You. I think when you see an important message about system, don't you guys feel like it's a solicit message and you sometimes don't even open -- if you didn't look at the Snohomish [unintelligible]...

I like the Septic System Care is up to You.

Yeah. [Several]

That's not so pushy.

A much better message, yeah.

**So now inside, Tina, you were saying...**

But I like the inside of this better.

Uh-huh, I do, too.

I mean, it makes you think on your -- an investment, because you've got to be thinking about it, and especially right now, I'm sure everybody is, so you might want to even word it right in that manner, but the house and the land looks pretty decent. What do you guys think? It all blends, the blue, blue, blue.

You're looking at a substantial tank and drainfield.

You should have one out in the background somewhere, but it looks kind of rural, though. It has a rural look.

[Unintelligible] dig up my system was a tree. They don't have one tree.

[Unintelligible] gravity [unintelligible] anymore, do they?

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

**Whoa, whoa, whoa.**

Sorry.

**Class.**

[Laughter]

Shut up.

**Okay. So what -- we've heard Tina. Anybody else? Comments about this inside?**

There's no trees. How many people have trees on their property? Yeah. So how many trees are in here?

I mean, the house looks like a normal rural-type house and that part, but it's...

That part looks like Mount Vernon. Mount Vernon looks like this. There's no trees. There's farmland.

Uh-huh. Okay, it does.

Yeah, with tulips.

There's not even any landscaping as far as, you know...

True. People care a little more. Even flowers. Add some flowers or something.

This one, there's a table. This one doesn't ask any questions. It just has statements.

Yeah, exactly, so maybe that's why it's like that. That's a good point.

The picture doesn't affect [unintelligible]...

[Unintelligible] big investment there.

**Okay. What about the idea of the investment?**

Definitely, yeah. Because putting in a new system is very expensive.

Uh-huh. // Uh-huh. // Yep, that's where the real money's at.

And I like the fact, the second line down there about proper care of your septic tank and drainfield will help protect your family and prevent the need for expensive repairs, as opposed to the scare tactic that says...

You're going to die and your dog's going to die. Sorry.

...you know, you've got serious problems. I think this is a much better way of presenting the message.

**A more positive way to do it.**

Yes. [Several]

The one thing about it where it says "a local sanitarian," now does that local sanitarian, does that mean someone from a septic company service or does that mean the county?

That's a good question.

From the county, I think.

Okay, so that should be clarified, huh?

Because it just sort of leaves it out there.

That's a good point.

And if you hadn't discussed before you wouldn't know. I mean, I wouldn't know.

Maybe they worded it like that so you wouldn't think it was the county so that you'd call.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Well, now that I've heard your guys' points on it, it makes sense, totally.

They do say further down there, "Return this card to receive a free visit from a Snohomish Health District sanitarian." // Yeah.

Maybe they should say "we'd be happy to help you in an objective way where we're not going to tell anybody."

[Laughter]

Dream on.

[Laughter]

**You can pick us up at the Shell station, put a blindfold on us, [unintelligible].**

[Laughter]

Pay no attention to our GPS.

**Anything else about this one?**

Well, the picture looks like Iowa to me.

I know, it's kind of blue and blue. You've got a lot of blue and blue there. They could probably change the background a little bit. Or, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to [unintelligible]. I'm sorry.

No alder trees, no skunk cabbage, [unintelligible].

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

**All right. The back page, then?**

It's cute, but not as cute as the girls, but if you're a major animal lover you're going to love it, and, you know, I mean, not that I'm not. That's why I love kids I think a lot, too.

I like the back of the second one better. **The girls? Okay.**

But, like, if you guys saw kids on the flier, would that grab you guys to want to open it, because you've already been done with your kids? [Unintelligible] still in the beginning process?

Yeah, but you're getting grandkids.

Okay. I was just checking.

I'm hoping for grandkids.

[Unintelligible] about your kids' health and stuff [unintelligible].

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

I believe that the message that they present on the second one tells you what they're -- it's not asking you a question, do you get the connection, they tell you the connection.

**That the septic system's under there.**

Right, exactly.

Yeah. [Several]

Do I get the connection between a dog and a kid and a septic tank? No, because my dog doesn't use the septic system.

**Okay. Well, let's vote on this one.**

The back page?

The whole thing.

What if they had them looking down, and then you see, like, the 3-D dimensional thing going on [unintelligible] this thing, you know? That'd probably be a little overkill. See, he's laughing at me over there. He doesn't want me get too overkill on the marketing.

**No, no. I'm taking it all down. We're capturing all of this.**

DOG & BOY	
1. Ineffective	1
2. ...	9
3. Compelling	0

**So we had one ineffective and nine in between. Okay, one more.**

It has an important message on there. I mean, it's not like it would be ineffective.

You do work for the county.

**One more.**

Drainfield rodeo? That's funny.

[Laughter]

It's kind of weird in the front.

The mom and daughter is a cute picture, but the little boy on that...

Okay, yeah. I started at the back.

...[unintelligible] looking.

The “important message about your septic system” would be important, because you’d want to open it to want to know what they’re talking about.

**Okay, so let’s step through it. We’re on Page 1, which would have your address on it, “an important message about your septic system,” which is similar or the same as some of the other messages we have. Anything different or...**

It’s like they’re targeting the...

I don't mind the picture.

**...strike you differently about this one?**

Well, it’s more of a single fam -- it’s mom and child...

Much younger person...

...so it’s more of a single-parent type of situation maybe.

**So let’s open it up. It’s the same picture inside on this one. “Septic system care is up to you.” What about the inside?**

Well, it just makes me think, “Who am I going to get to -- [unintelligible] have a husband.”

Yeah. Hopefully there’s not that many in the 78,000 home single people. My goodness, you know? But it could happen, that’s for sure, so it’s always good to know.

**Anything about the message in the green box? I mean, in the middle there that you like or puts you off?**

It says it’s putting you in danger again. It’s telling you, you know, if you don't do it, your family and pets are going to be in danger. I don't think, unless you’re real -- I don't know. Somebody that doesn't know a lot, I suppose, then you’ve got be real simple, I suppose I would say.

[Unintelligible].

Yeah. To not realize if you’ve got a problem, if you see leakage out there or something like that. I mean, then you’d care of it naturally. I don't think you’d just sit there and let it go, so I don't think the deal where the system is a danger to your family and pets, you know, a failing system.

Well, the second one I think has a better -- a failing septic system is a serious health risk, it grabs you but it’s not as in your face, maybe, as “danger.”

Trying to scare you into doing something that’s supposed to...

If they start off with the second paragraph maybe instead of the first paragraph, it reads maybe a little more friendlier. Like the Snohomish Health District is committed to helping you maintain your septic system. Maybe take off the “return this card.” Like, if they start off with the sentence that way where it’s, like, opening the door to communication and then giving them the information but, like, they’re saying they don’t like the whole danger scare, but I mean maybe some people need to have that, you know, danger scare. You guys are very educated and have, you know, a lot of knowledge about it. It just depends on what market you’re targeting, I guess.

And I don't know. Number two seems to be -- they’re committed to helping you maintain your system. How are they going to do that? You know? Are they going to have an inspector come out to your house all the time? How are they going to help you?

They’re going to help you. They’re not going to pay for any repairs...

So that’s what you need to learn.

...or anything like that. If anything else, they’ll charge you for a permit and stuff.

Right, that’s what they’ll do.

Oh, okay. Interesting. Lovely. Okay.

They're there to make money, not to lose money.

[Unintelligible] so they've got to start looking at the basically contamination.

See, I pay water/sewer. Does everybody get water/sewer?

What about the line underneath that's been underneath the website line there's "Protect your septic system. Your family's health depends on it." Is that effective or does it put you off or doesn't have an impact one way or the other?

Well, I think that having read the first part and not caring for that as well, it makes you not really want to pay as much attention to what follows. You know?

You could have a septic system and it's not by your well, so you've got your proper distance from it, and you have your well tested. It's going to tell you what is your water -- what's going through your water, so to me it just seems like if you just give people information then let them deal with what they have, they're going to ask for help if they don't know.

**What about this picture on the back, Drainfield Rodeo.**

He lost his horse.

Did his horse sink in the drainfield?

What is that? His pony?

But it doesn't to me relate to -- like, I don't live in a place where I can have horses. I mean, whereas maybe you guys may be able to have horses. So, for me, I live in a homeowner's association. I have a half-an-acre backyard, but can't have a whole lot. So this wouldn't pertain to me, and I'm not -- it depends on the person, I think. I think family would catch for me personally are the kids better, but it all depends on the person and personality.

**Okay. Well, let's rate this one. Same rating.**

DRAINFIELD RODEO	
1. Ineffective	5
2. ...	4
3. Compelling	0

I think humor catches people's attention more than serious -- I would throw these away. I wouldn't [unintelligible].

That's true. You could make, you know...

But how do you make septic systems humorous?

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

**So we had five 1s and four 2s on that one, so not too effective. Okay, so let's do this. Of these four, which is your favorite?**

Which is your favorite?	
1. Your Family	
2. Under There	
3. Dog & Boy	
4. Drainfield Rodeo	

**Number two, and that's the one that also had the exposed drainfield and was nonthreatening and - - okay, very good.**

**Okay. Now, we'll go into the lightning round. Now, we're going to do what they call taglines, just slogans. And I want to just put these up, and these are things like -- I'm going to show you a bunch**

of things that might go here or here and that appear on something like this or might appear on the first page I show you, just a tagline, and we'll use the same one, two, three scale.

[MODERATOR: Exercise explanation]

Care for your septic system	
1. Ineffective	
2. ...	
3. Compelling	6
How's your septic system?	
1. Ineffective	
2. ...	
3. Compelling	

**It's all 2s and 3s on that one, mostly.**

Your family. Your septic system. Get the connection?	
1. Ineffective	
2. ...	
3. Compelling	

**So about half said ineffective on that one, and then the rest were split between 2s and 3s.**

Septic system care depends on you	
1. Ineffective	0
2. ...	4
3. Compelling	6

**Six 3s and four 2s on that one.**

A healthy home needs a healthy septic system	
1. Ineffective	
2. ...	
3. Compelling	

**Kind of a bell-shaped curve on that one. Half of you were right in the middle, and some up and some down.**

[Laughter]

Does your home have a dirty secret?	
1. Ineffective	4
2. ...	2
3. Compelling	4

That's actually your funny line right there. Have a little toilet person popping out or something.

[Laughter]

**Four at one end, four at the other, and two in the middle, so real split on that one.**

What happens after you flush?	
1. Ineffective	
2. ...	
3. Compelling	

I'm relieved.

[Laughter]

**Another bell-shaped curve. Half of you in the middle.**

Don't lose precious dollars down the drain		
1. Ineffective		
2. ...		
3. Compelling		6

**Kind of liked that one, six 3s on that one.**

Protect your investment		
1. Ineffective		
2. ...		
3. Compelling		9

**Nine 3s on that one.**

Keep your septic bugs happy		
1. Ineffective		5
2. ...		
3. Compelling		

**Okay. Kind of evenly across the board on that one. Half of you said ineffective and then the rest were split between 2s and 3s.**

Septic system care is up to you		
1. Ineffective		
2. ...		
3. Compelling		7

**Seven 3s on that one.**

A plug for keeping your drainfield unplugged		
1. Ineffective		
2. ...		
3. Compelling		

It doesn't make sense.

Huh-uh.

It'd be a tongue-twister.

**No lobbying at polling time. Okay, the next one.**

Care for your septic tank and drainfield		
1. Ineffective		
2. ...		
3. Compelling		7

**Seven 3s on that one.**

The care and feeding of your septic system		
1. Ineffective		
2. ...		5
3. Compelling		

**Half in the middle and half on either end.**

Extend the life of your septic system		
1. Ineffective		0
2. ...		0
3. Compelling		10

**Ten 3s on that one. Everybody liked that one.**

Septic systems and the environment—it's all connected		
1. Ineffective		
2. ...		
3. Compelling		8

That's much better than asking the question.

You need to be conscientious. It's giving you a conscientious statement.

**Eight 3s on that one.**

How healthy is your septic system?		
1. Ineffective		
2. ...		7
3. Compelling		

**Seven people gave that a 2, right in the middle.**

You've got a big investment out there		
1. Ineffective		3
2. ...		5
3. Compelling		2

**Okay, so three, five, two. Kind of evenly distributed.**

Your septic system may be out of sight, but it shouldn't be out of mind		
1. Ineffective		
2. ...		
3. Compelling		7

**Seven 3s on that one.**

Don't let your septic system drain your wallet		
1. Ineffective		
2. ...		
3. Compelling		8

Ouch.

**Eight 3s on that one.**

Flushing is only the beginning		
1. Ineffective		1
2. ...		5
3. Compelling		4

Where does it all go?

**We'll have a tour right after this.**

[Laughter]

[Unintelligible].

**So four people gave that a 3, five gave it a 2, and a 1.**

Septic problems stink		
1. Ineffective		
2. ...		
3. Compelling		6

Reminds you of *Meet the Fockers*. Have you guys seen that one? It's great.

**So six 3s on that one, so kind of liked that one.**

**So there. I told you, lightning round. Which one did you like best?**

I'm going to go with the flushing one. **Which flushing one?**

Flushing is only the beginning? // Yes.

Draining your pocket, probably. You don't want it to drain your pocket.

What about the environment one?

Uh-huh, I thought that one was a good one, too.

Couple of good ones in there. **Uh-huh, which ones did you like?** Like she said, the environment and in your wallet. Those two there.

I like the one that says septic care is up to you or something like that.

I agree with that.

**So which one do you think you'll remember tomorrow?**

The one that hits you in the pocketbook.

I think they should go off the whole Focker's theme.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

I think I will remember the flushing is only the beginning.

Yeah, yeah.

[Laughter]

Yeah, and it makes you think, you know, okay, now, where does it all go at this point in time?

**Any that put you off? I mean, not that you didn't think they were very good, but I didn't like that one, it was offensive or it was too stupid or anything like that that you recall?**

I didn't like the "get the connection?" I thought it should have "stupid" on it.

Yeah. [Several]

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

**And you said earlier you liked better when it says there's a connection rather than...**

Well, it says what the connection is.

**All right. Any other thoughts about that? We're really whipping through this stuff.**

Because we're all meeting at the casino after.

[Laughter]

**[MODERATOR: Website handouts]**

Healthy septic sounds nice.

Are these all working addresses?

**Well, they're all options, so their question would be which one does the public like. Which one do you like that you'd be most likely to remember and use.**

Yeah, it's one to remember and use.

**Yeah, so any of them sort of jump out at you one way or the other, or really like that one?**

Five. [Several]

Six and eight, because the six is simple, and eight is healthy septic. I mean, it's like making you think conscientiously about it, but six is easy.

Six for remembering. It's easy.

I like one, septic info.

That makes sense, too.

That makes sense, too, yeah.

**You ready to vote?**

1. www.septicinfo.org	4
2. www.septichealth.org	0
3. www.septiccare.org	0
4. www.septicsystemcare.org	1
5. www.septic.snohomishhealth.org	1
6. www.myseptic.org	3
7. www.mysepticsystem.org	0
8. www.healthyseptic.org	1
9. www.safeseptic.org	0

Does it count if you never turn on the computer? **Yeah, you get to vote, too. That'll be my next question, though.**

Well, it's funny about, like, how letters are, like the letters all blend so much with septic info, even though -- and I know it's way too much, but that would be the only thing. It's simple, and it's a good part, but "my septic" stands out and the two words separate a little better, and that's the only thing that would make me go for number 6 over number 1, which is kind of weird.

If you Googled, the first thing you'd probably Google would be septic.

True, too.

I don't like number 2. For some reason, just glancing at it, septic appears more or less in the others, but with number 2 the "C" kind of blends in with health. That's the way it jumps to my eye, anyway. **Septi health?** Yeah.

I'm with her on that.

You must have been trained to ch [unintelligible].

**So four votes for number 1, one vote for number 4, one vote for number 5, three votes for number 6, one vote for number 8.**

[Unintelligible].

**So what was it about [unintelligible] so we had -- what'd I say? 1 and 6 got the most votes, although it's pretty spread out. What did you like best about 1? Anything else that --**

Number 1 to me, that just conveys whatever we're after, information about my septic system, and "my septic" that just, to me, that sounds kind of corny. MySpace, my septic.

That's probably why they're doing it. You never know.

[Unintelligible].

It gives you ownership of your septic, you know? Maybe that's what it is. I'm conveying it that way. It's my septic.

[Unintelligible].

We'd probably look at two or three of the sites. I mean, I would. Or more, to see if they were the same or if they had different information.

**Now, you know, these days, they're adding more of these extensions on the end. You know, it can be .com, or .org, and one of them that's available now is .info. So if these, imagine them saying .info instead of .org, does that change them?**

You would be taking off septic info, right? You'd just say septic dot info?

**Well, it would probably say septic -- No, because septic dot info I think is taken. The first one would say septicinfo.info.**

I'd go with number 6, probably.

### **Myseptic.info**

Yeah. Okay. That would make a difference between 1 and 6.

Well, when I type in something on the Google, if I just type septic on my particular -- maybe it's because we've got Vista, but a bar comes down with all these different sites that you can...

Yeah, uh-huh.

...and so if you click on one you get all basically, anyway.

And you can choose your preference there.

Yeah.

Pumping or maintenance or repair or new system or whatever.

Right.

I guess, what is the county hoping? That we will put this in our favorites?

[Laughter]

My fave 5s.

I don't think most -- Speaking for myself, I won't spend a lot of time on this website researching what the healthy septic tank is. I know that every three years or so I need to have it pumped.

**Right. So then, if that's the case then more likely that they would want one that you can remember, and not to be in your favorites but that would be logical and you'd remember because you wouldn't put it in your favorites.**

It's almost like you need to have it maybe in a calendar form or something that says when was the last time you -- You know, just like when you change the water in your filter in your refrigerator? I don't know if you guys have a little thing that you write a reminder down or something like that, because you know you've got to do it or else your water is not going to be properly filtered. Something that would give you a reminder. When was the last time, and you'd write the date down or something. I mean, you'd either write it down or, I mean, if you're --

I believe your companies usually send you a flyer in the mail.

[Unintelligible] I don't even use it that much, as much as I should.

Yeah. And I'm just thinking kind of like Nancy that if I'm going to go on the internet looking for information about septic systems, I like Google, so I would go to Google and I would type in "septic systems" or something like that. And I'm going to get a return. I'm not going to necessarily say, "Oh, yeah, I remember it's septicinfo.org." Because there might be septicinfo.org or septicinfo.info and it would be two separate sites.

Or maybe it should just be, like, under Snohomish.

**Would the extension make any difference one way or the other then? Info or org?**

To me, it wouldn't.

I like info better than org.

I think if info is your extension, you can compress the first part of it.

Maybe Snohomish septic or something, something that snoho or whatever dot info septic, or snohoseptic.info. Right? Is that what we're thinking here? Because it needs to be -- because once you do the Google, it's going to put up whatever, and then you've still got to minimize it down to your location and all that and then put that in, because it's going to, yeah, pull up whatever in general is around you, and then you've still got to put in, right? Or your location.

Well, only if you're doing www dot, so whatever, but if you just go to -- and you're just looking, you don't have to.

Does it pull up pretty local stuff for you?

Yeah. You can put Washington or something like that.

Because I know I'd put where I'm at just to get it to target down, you know?

That's why I picked 5, because it had Snohomish in the -- so you would [unintelligible].

Just go Snoho -- well, don't they abbreviate themselves, anyway? Snohomish? What do they say? What is it? Snoho? Snoho.org. Then it's not so big. Septic at snoho.org, if they don't already have it used. Because nobody wants to type all that in and remember all that, do we?

I would guess that Snohomish Health has a website...

That you could find a link from there.

...[unintelligible] with septicsonhomish.org.

There you go. I see what you're saying, too.

Web addresses are really -- I mean, unless you go there all the time, who cares? I'll speak for myself. I don't type in addresses in the url. I Google it and if I was looking for Snohomish County septic information, I would put that in Google and presumably septic and Snohomish County would bring up something about [unintelligible].

And then if you wanted to keep it, then you'd save it.

Yeah, then I'd put it in my favorites.

Is this a reason to limit that findings? Is there a reason why? Or you can't answer that, really? Is there, to minimize them doing the extra research? Is that what it is or...

**One is just to have something that's memorable and that's going to go on these sheets, and one that would, you know, show up in the search.**

Well, the one that's on there right now is pretty simplistic.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

**Well, that's all the stuff I had to show you. Let's go home. Any last comments for the good of the order?**

It was interesting. I liked it.

They probably won't listen to us, anyway.

**Oh, you'd be surprised. It's actually very helpful. Obviously, they're working on developing some material to communicate with people, and this is part of the process to end up developing something that's going to work that people are going to relate to and find useful and open when it arrives and all that, so it's been real helpful.**

One term that this is the first time I've ever seen it that's used in here on every one is "sanitarian." I've never heard that term before.

That's like their technical term of their name now.

Is that a new position in the county? Should I apply?

Yeah, how much does it pay?

Just like your garbage man. Now, he's a sanitation engineer.

Yeah, oh, there you go.

**So we have another group coming in. Like I said, we were doing a series of these. [End of Recording]**

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# TRANSCRIPT

## Suburban Septic System Owners Focus Group

Snohomish County 23 June 09

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**[MODERATOR: Welcome and Ground Rules]**

Tom Stein, I'm from Woodinville. Actually, Maltby, but I've got a Woodinville address, and I'm a self-unemployed-independent dump truck driver.

My name is Duane Rhodes. I live outside of Arlington. I work for the Boy Scouts.

I'm Jeff. I live out in Woodinville in the Molpy area, and currently I'm the house husband. I can't find a job anywhere so that's where I'm at. **Well, you've got a lot of company these days.**

**Lynne?** I live just outside Arlington. I'm a physical therapist. I commute to Seattle. And what else do you need to know? **That's fine. Sorry about the commute.** Yeah.

**Beverly?** I am an elementary music teacher and I also live just outside of Arlington.

Oh, my turn. I'm an at-home mom right now and I live in between Snohomish and Lake Stevens.

My name's Rick. I live outside of Snohomish. It's now an Everett address due to the good graces of the government changing the zip codes down in the flats. Currently unemployed, courtesy of Snohomish County. I'm a jack of all trades.

I'm Cheri. I'm also unemployed. I'm looking to start a new business. **And where do you live?** Arlington. Sorry.

I'm Art. And I'm semi-retired. And I live just south of [unintelligible] in Molpy on the Snohomish County side of Woodinville.

My name is Les and I live a couple of miles east of Lake Stevens, and I work at Boeing. I've been out here for quite awhile.

**And Dan?** I live in the Clearview area and Mill Creek, between those two. I am still working.

One of the few.

**Where do you work?** I work for the railroad. I'm a railroad machinist. Locomotive maintenance. **So you drive to Seattle, too.**

At the turntable?

Yeah. Across the street from Fisherman's Wharf.

**[MODERATOR: Introduce keypads.]**

How long have you lived with a septic system?

- 1 - 2 yrs or less
- 2 - 2 to 4 years
- 3 - 5 to 9 years
- 4 - 10 to 19 years
- 5 - 20 years or more      8
- 6 - Not sure

**Eight of you at 20 or more years, and then one each [unintelligible]. Okay. Then the next question is the same scale.**

How old is your system?		
1 - 2 yrs or less		
2 - 2 to 4 years		
3 - 5 to 9 years		3
4 - 10 to 19 years		
5 - 20 years or more	6	
6 - Not sure		1

**So three of you say 5 to 9 years, and six of you are 20 or more, and one person not sure. Okay.**

Have you had repairs on your system?	
1. Yes	
2. No	

In our current address or anytime? So is that our current address or is that... **At your current address.**

Any repairs at all? **Yeah.**

I just pumped my rental house after 35 years.

**Any repairs. If you had to have anything repaired.**

So not maintenance. Just repairs.

Maintenance means, like, getting pumped or [unintelligible]. Some people like to use that tree root stuff, you know, because they have trees.

**So mostly no. A couple people have.**

The systems that are 20 years older and older are better systems than the new ones. The new ones are programmed to fail rather rapidly.

Knock on wood.

What type of system do you have?	
1. All gravity distribution (no pump)	6
2. Low pressure distribution (LPD)	
3. Sandfilter (with LPD or drip disposal)	
4. Aerobic treatment (with LPD or drip disposal)	
5. Other	
6. Not sure / Don't know	

**So six gravity, a couple of others, and not sure. But others, some of you said other. What other kind do you have?**

[Unintelligible].

How would you describe your knowledge of your septic system?	
1. I'm well versed in its care and maintenance	6
2. I pay attention to it off and on	
3. I don't give it much thought until something goes wrong	5

There's two of us, my husband and I, and I'm supposed to answer as myself, correct? Or as a mixed couple response? **Good question.**

You're the one that's here.

Yeah, I was going to say that's my husband's job to know what's going on.

See, my husband doesn't have a clue, but I do it all.

**So put it down for you. And then, so we have about half and half saying, "I'm well-versed," and then the other half. Six said that and five said, "I don't give it any thought until something goes wrong."**

**So let me just clarify that, then. How many are the someone else in the house is the one that takes care of it. You two. Anybody else?**

I mean, I watch it, but if I have questions I turn and ask. **No, I know it's always a joint... Yeah. Yeah, okay. So it's never quite that cut and dry, is it, who does these things. So we'll make sure that I keep that in mind.**

**Okay. So if something did go wrong with your septic system, who would you call?**

Like the name of the company? **Well, would you call a company?** Oh, yeah.

Probably, yeah. **And who? Not the name, but would that person be typically maybe the installer or the maintenance people? Who would you call? I want to know fairly specifically. You don't have to tell me the name or anything.**

I'd call septic services.

I'd just call my dad and find out who he called the last time.

Again, my husband's a certified installer...

So you'd just have your husband do it.

...so I'd turn around and ask him. I'm not sure if he's still current in Snohomish, but he would know who to call. So I don't know what else to say. It's sort of an odd situation.

Are we allowed to say company names? **Oh, that's fine.** Don't use Evergreen.

Amen.

I was just letting you know.

Okay, nice to know.

I worked at Cuz Concrete for a few years, years ago, and they were good back then. I don't know how they are now.

There was a young fellow that I've used for years that pumps our tank on a regular basis, and I kind of find that you do get on a first-name basis, you do identify small problems as you're working your way through the thing, and we had a very, very minor problem at one time, and it was just in the concrete distribution box. It was simply a matter of replacing the old concrete box, that was it, and that took care of...

Well, if you stay up on the basis and you...

...that's right, but that individual knows as much about that system really as I do. And the other thing that I have kept within my house file at home is from Snohomish County Health Department the plan that we had to file at the time the system, the as-built, and you know you can go to the county and they'll give that to you for nothing. It's a pretty handy thing to have, even if you're just going to go out and do some landscape work in the yard or whatever.

Especially when it comes to your drainfields, it's important to know you're...

Well, that, and a lot of people I've used don't even know where the tank is.

Yeah, the people that lived at our house before us didn't know and they planted apple trees over it.

**If you had a problem, would you call the county?**

No. [Several]

They'd be the last people I'd call.

I was going to say, that'd be the last people I'd call.

**Would you call the health district?**

They would be the last people. That's the county. That's the same thing.

**As I said, we've been doing several of these meetings, and the last part of our discussion was very familiar.**

No doubt.

Can the county even do anything?

**Yeah, there's a question. Why...**

Make it really hard for you. That's what they'll do.

**What is the resistance? We hear it a lot, so what is the resistance of calling the county?**

Well, they'd probably find a protected fish down there and I probably couldn't do anything. Probably couldn't pump it or any of it.

The problem that I would have with it, and just my knowledge of building through the years and actually having built my house that we're in now and having installed the field with [unintelligible] and those guys getting the permits and the whole thing, the county would come down and want to examine the entire area, and that's why you in theory had 100 percent reserve at the time the original field was put in. And they're going to come in and bring up little issues of, you know, currently this is what we're doing. And it's unrealistic to expect a lot of latitude to be cut from those people, because I kind of suspect that in a lot of various -- if sewers are even on the horizon, they're going to want you tying into that.

That's exactly what I'm going for. I am so afraid that they are going to want me to pay to hook up to the sewer.

You're going to pay and you're going to pay royally.

Oh, yeah, it's expensive. My people down at the end of the road, they had the opportunity. They had no choice. They had to.

Yeah, once they find out about it, it's pretty much -- they're going to make it so hard for you to keep up with what you have, you're going to just pray to get the sewer system almost.

But there's different levels of septic tank failure. [Unintelligible] built a whole subdivision behind us and he's had three houses where they had to go in and replace the entire interior of the house because of septic failure. And it's an above-ground system, and that's what you were laughing about, you know, those are one that -- I've had to put those in at jobs and had Snohomish County standing there measuring how high the water runs under pressure, you know, you turn the hose upside down and they'll go around and measure each and every one, and each lateral has to be at a different height, and that's some...

Yeah, we went through a lateral system last time.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

It makes you wonder what government inspector checked that off on his list and said it was good.

My dad's house, it's over 60 or 70 years old and it's never been pumped, checked, or anything, because it was built before that, and they've never had a problem, because it's about 15 feet underground.

My neighbor's building a new house on his property. He had a trailer, mobile home, and he's going to take the mobile home out, but he's building a new house. He already had a system in. It was working fine. But with this new house, they made him put in this new system which is a pressure system, and he goes in and, you know, he looks at the print. He did the work himself. The engineer gave him the specs, and he went to the specs, and the engineer said, "Well, you've got to do this." And so he did what the engineer told him to do. Snohomish County came out and they told him, "Wait a minute. You can't do it that way. That's wrong." "But the engineer told me that." "That don't matter, that's wrong." So he had to add 40 more feet of pipe to his system. Now, this system is all above ground -- or it was, until this week. He finally got it passed, I guess, on -- or last week he got it passed, and so he finally backfilled everything. But he says, "I don't understand. The pipes are inch and a half pipe," or something like that, and he says there's three-quarter inch holes every eight feet or six feet, you know, and he says, "My old system has got four-inch pipe with holes every six inches."

They make it impossible to [unintelligible].

You know what the difference is?

**Wait, wait, wait. Sorry.**

Yeah, we're getting off on a...

**I have to stay on my agenda here. And I appreciate the information, but I want to cover some ground here, and one of the things that I want to do is show you some pieces of information.**

**[MODERATOR: Distributes handout]**

Keep solids, toxics, oils, and greases out of the drain How realistic is that? 1. Easy ... Difficult 2. Practical? 3. Effective? 4. Worthwhile? 5. Confusing?
---

Pretty cut and dry to me.

Yeah. [Several]

It's right on.

That's pretty much how it's supposed to be.

**Are those things that you know already and anything on there that you weren't sure about before or didn't know or disagree with?**

I'd never heard that you should use liquid detergent instead of powder detergent.

I've never heard that, either.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

I had no idea.

I've never had a problem with powder.

If you want to train your system to treat it best, you will always use liquid.

Yeah, that's -- my septic guy told me a number of years ago and I didn't know.

I didn't know that bath oil and excessive soaps, though. I didn't know you had to pay attention to what was going down the drain in the bath, I guess.

They don't break down.

I didn't even think about it. Yeah, it's pretty commonsense. I didn't even think about it until I read that.

**But it's pretty clear as a communication thing?**

Oh, yeah.

<p>Reduce and control water usage How realistic is that? 1. Easy ... Difficult 2. Practical? 3. Effective? 4. Worthwhile? 5. Confusing?</p>
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**Response to that? Anything there that's...**

I always drain my hot tub into mine.

I was going to say, how would people do that?

Yeah, I wouldn't even know how to do that.

**Again, is this a clear list?**

Yeah, very clear.

**Clear list and not confusing?**

Rick's got a question.

Do you want us to use the buttons for this?

On the spacing of the laundry, I use Acme. The man, he said, "Don't do over two loads of washing a day." That combined with the showers and baths and everything else, it overloads the field. **So really space it out.**

I was told two to three loads of laundry a day, too, by Acme.

Now, does the low-flow washer, like ours is 11 gallons a load, does that make a difference?

It should make a difference. A standard washer takes 16.

And it depends on the number of people in the house, how many showers and baths, because that adds up really fast.

<p>Perform tank pumping and maintenance How realistic is that? 1. Easy ... Difficult 2. Practical? 3. Effective? 4. Worthwhile? 5. Confusing?</p>
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I'm not sure about the first one. I've never even heard of that.

I've never heard that, and we've never done that.

I've always had mine inspected by, yeah, by our septic people. I never even heard -- I never knew there was someone even.

Yeah. I think that the shortcoming of that one in my opinion, anyway, is that the guy that's driving for the septic system, unless you know him and have had the same individual for a number of years...

History-wise.

...you're, yeah, you're not really going to be too comfortable with their knowledge. And I don't -- there's no classes that I know of on pumping septic tanks, and I don't know of any state certification. There's probably something.

I've never heard of it, yeah.

How many of you have your septic tank inspected every six months?

Well, six months is a bit much, but I can understand, and I'll tell you...

I do ours every year. Don't pump it, but inspect it.

...the only reason for that is if you've got a filter that's going from, you know, you've got two basic tanks and you'll have a filter going on your last tank in line to the distribution box. That is what I would assume, and I actually, I've got mine on a stick and I've got a plastic cover that Rick and I put on the darn thing. It's real easy, two screws and it's out, and you pull it, take your garden house, and this is where your laundry detergent -- I can always tell when my wife stuffed down the hole, because little white sparklies and stuff.

It's in there [unintelligible].

Yeah. That in fact will -- if that plugs, that will back your entire system up, just from the liquid, because the water is not allowed to flow through. And that's perhaps where they're saying the six months.

I'm just, in looking at this, the numbers are really -- seem excessive as far as [unintelligible]...

A septic tank pumping company probably came up with these numbers.

This would make me go and...

No, I don't think so. I agree 100 percent with per year pumping of the tank, because what happens, you get solids into your -- even your four-inch lines, hey, you're toast. And I don't care if you've 140 feet of line or 500 feet of line, eventually that's going to plug and it's not going to be working. And those solids, they actually turn rock hard.

It would just depend on the usage and...

If there's two of you in the house, okay, fine. If you've got your children at home, like two kids and two adults, then you'd better stick with that three-year thing.

**What about the next one that says to have it pumped every three years?**

That's what I'm talking about is every three years you pump it.

I would say, well, yeah, that's, yeah, common knowledge. I think it is, isn't it?

[Unintelligible].

No.

No. I've had mine pumped [unintelligible].

It depends on the system you have.

I was going to say, if you have a real old one, you really don't have to.

Gravity feed, they should never be pumped.

My grandma's never had hers done.

You are still going to plug your system. At some point in your life, you're going to plug it.

I had a system that plugged up down in Portland, and it'd been there for 32 years and never been pumped. And then, it finally started to back up.

My grandma didn't know until -- actually, I don't think she knew that she was on a septic until it started backing up in the house.

But there's a matter of economics involved here, too. You could pay \$300 to pump the tank every three years, or you pay about \$20,000 to replace the system.

I just pumped my rental house last year for the first time since I've owned it, and I've owned it since 1974. And...

It was gravity?

...it's a gravity, yeah.

Oh, see, with gravity it's a little safer, I think.

That's why I'm [unintelligible] this.

It needed it, you know, and so I pumped it out, and it's fine. Working great.

If these numbers are on here for I think for different systems, the numbers -- if there's clarification, because for me these numbers seem really frequent, and I've got a gravity feed, and it would tend to make me [unintelligible]...

Now, the systems that have got the...

**Okay, so it varies depending on [unintelligible].**

Well, it says depending on your system type. Maybe they should put that first.

**Yeah, it does say that.**

So people don't just go, whoa, and stop reading.

Because, I don't know, we have a gravity and we only pumped it once in 20 years, and when we did it, it was in great shape.

So maybe if they put "depending on your system type" first, before they said that whole six to three years, I mean, that's... **Yeah, okay.** Yeah, you stop reading. Once you read that part, you're like, whoa. **I see, yeah, good point.**

Protect your drainfield and reserve areas  
How realistic is that?  
1. Easy ... Difficult  
2. Practical?  
3. Effective?  
4. Worthwhile?  
5. Confusing?

I think that sounds good, too.

**Anything there that jumps out either positive or negatively?**

Other than the fact that most people don't know where their drainfield is.

Yeah, maybe they should put in there you can receive your -- because you can get, like you said, you can get the record for free. Maybe they should include that on there.

And that would be a great thing to include location and stuff under this pumping...

Like a website or...

**Of where your drainfield is?**

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

How to find out where your drainfield is.

Yeah, because some people don't even know you can get a map.

Because that would be a knowledge information thing that lots of people -- then, if you have all this other stuff underneath, then it makes more sense, but educate the public.

**Yeah, good. Okay. Anything else?**

Regularly inspect your drainfield How realistic is that? 1. Easy ... Difficult 2. Practical? 3. Effective? 4. Worthwhile? 5. Confusing?
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Well, that would kind of go along with: Where is your drainfield?

If you're mowing the lawn, you're going to be out there.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

That's kind of a meaningless statement, because your...

Your drainfield is part of the septic.

...drainfield is underground, and you're really not going to be digging up to see if it's draining. You'll walk across it, and then you'd fall in up to your ankles...

Yeah, I think that's what it means by "wet spots."

**It says to check for wet spots or...**

Or if you have an area where you're having good drainage, you can have a failure and land can sink down, but you will never see any dampness, so it could be that, also.

**How about checking your ports every couple of weeks if your drainfield has monitoring ports.**

If you have ports, that's a good thing. **That's new?** That's new. A lot of [unintelligible] and stuff like that.

And most of your gravity feeds don't have ports.

Neither does the other ones.

**See, one of the reasons they hire me to do this is I don't know anything about it, so I can be really objective and ask all these silly, dumb questions and...**

No question is a dumb question.

No, it's not.

Well, some of these systems, you know, they have alarms...

Those newer ones, yeah.

...that go off.

We looked at getting one of those new French ones put in, but we saw how much it was and the permit you had to get through the county. We were like, "Never mind."

Oh, yeah.

I've got another neighbor that built a house on the other side of me, and he's got these things in some sort of a pump and a fan and all this other stuff that goes into his, and he says that about every three years they've got to be replaced. And, you know, that doesn't make a whole lot of sense to me, you know?

They've over-engineered some of these systems and simplicity is the best thing you can have.

And his ground is exactly the same as mine. You know, I mean, we're side by side on the property. The only difference is his house is to the front of his and his drainfield is in the back, and mine's the other way around. My drainfield's in the front. And so he couldn't do gravity because the way his land is, but I could. Of course, I put mine in, you know, 25 years ago.

That's the difference.

It's the time.

There's codes for the particular time.

Yeah.

**So how about this card? Just as an information piece?**

I think it's a pretty good card, actually.

Yeah, it's really nice.

**I mean, would you like to have it as a [unintelligible] or would you like to have something like this?**

Well, especially if you're a new homeowner. A lot of new homeowners don't have a clue that they even have a septic sometimes until...

Until it backs up in the home.

Yeah.

As long as it identifies the type. Because the way I read that, you would have a minimum of five. You don't have the leach field up there. So each one of these would be, you know... **Slightly different?**

Yeah, so like she was saying, yeah, they need to put a number on there that you can access or a website that you go and find your -- what you have and where it's located.

And it would make sense to have, you know, certain types of systems may have higher requirements as far as inspection and frequency of changing things than others.

Which is why that website is really good, because then you can, if you know, you can go and research it.

I don't know. Like, when we bought our house, my husband made a point to learn about the type of system and how it works and what the maintenance should be. So I would think that anybody who's buying a house would want to find out.

Well, most people right now that are buying homes are 20, 21 years old.

It's part of the disclosure, but it would also help, yeah, to have this...

Many people just don't even think to ask does this have a septic or is this on a sewer, yeah.

What if you changed the wording to how to care for your septic system or... **Oh, for the title?** Yeah.

**So if you had this, where would you keep it?**

In my house file.

In my file with my septic information.

I would tape it to my laundry room wall.

Yeah, there you go. Tape it to the door of the laundry room. Yeah, remember this.

**So is this a good size?**

Yeah, perfect size.

Yeah. [Several]

**Because you know it could be smaller. It could be a refrigerator magnet.**

I wouldn't want it on my refrigerator.

You wouldn't want to put it on your refrigerator, though, but I'm just saying, you know...

If there's a number and the county that you could call if you had questions, that would be the other additional thing. Not just a generic number, but an extension that'll get you right there, because I tell you, if you call and you don't have the right number...

Oh, you're not getting anywhere.

There's one suggestion that I might put on to this if you were to think of tinkering with the format, and with the homeowner as the ultimate user. If you had just a column -- I would visualize something like this in my house taped to, like, the hot water tank, and that's a central area because I do things differently. I've got a grease pen, and when I replaced my hot water tank, I wrote the date on it. When I did the furnace, the same thing. I would do the same thing with this, and that gives you the record in one place that you go to. How often do you look in that little closet that's got your furnace and the hot water tank? Maybe once a year, if that. But you know that the information is there, and you're not digging through a file someplace if something goes south on you. You can just open the door and look.

Oh, I have a list of different numbers [unintelligible].

Right, right, right.

List number one, what kind of system I have.

Yeah, or a contact number for...

And the location, tentative location of the tank, but blanks at least that people can fill in, too.

And the person to call in the event of emergency, because things like your septic tank backing up on you always happen at the worst time, like Thanksgiving Day...

Or Christmas.

That was mine. That was mine. Thanksgiving Day.

Yeah, well, that's when they happen. That's when you have the most people in your house, the system is really being stressed out at the time.

**[MODERATOR: Distributes handout]**

**What's your overall reaction to that? Anything on there that you like, dislike, jumps out at you in any way?**

Without the Snohomish County logo on it, I get so much junk mail...

I would just toss it.

...[unintelligible] have something important, I would just go like this. So if you're going to do this, I would definitely say you have to have this on there, or even a little bit bigger.

I'd say bigger, because I wouldn't open it.

Because honestly, I'm sure all of us are in the same boat. It's just like, oh.

You know, more junk mail, the first thing you do is you go -- if it's not a letter size, it sits in the...

You could do a smaller picture, bigger down here and bigger here, but definitely the Snohomish County...

Because that gets your attention. When you see that come, then you know you at least want to look at it.

**Okay. So that would be my question. Would you open this or just look at it or...**

I would toss it immediately...

**...look at it on your way to the recycling bin?**

...unless I saw that first.

If you didn't see this thing, it would be in the trash before you know it.

I have learned to open everything.

Yeah, I would never get to see it.

This little band that you've got inside would be about perfect across...

Exactly, yeah.

...across to here.

At least that size on the front.

Where you've got the Health District along with the Snohomish County.

Yeah, that -- yeah, that would be great. That would tell you that this is important.

You've got the right information, but you've got it on the wrong page.

It's like when the auditors send you your statements about your house, it's always blue and big and Snohomish County.

Yeah, if it looks important, I don't throw it away.

Rick has a question or a comment.

How many people know that the Health District is not Snohomish County?

**How many think it's part of the county?**

Oh, I thought it was.

**Or thought it was until just now.**

I'm sorry, the health -- the building downtown is...

They're two separate entities.

**The Snohomish Health District. Is it part of the county or not?**

No.

**Yes? How many say yes?**

I would...

I figured it's part of the county.

I'm sorry. I don't understand.

I thought it was part of the county.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

It's not part of the county, apparently. I didn't know that. I thought it was.

Health districts are not part of the county.

Look at the return address, people.

Where is it?

Oh. // Oh, this one?

If you're going to look at something, look at it from top to bottom, left to right, both sides.

Well, this is going to Surface Water Management.

I would prefer the county government didn't -- Pardon?

You're saying this is to Surface Water Management?

Bingo.

Right, that's the county.

But that is part of Snohomish County Surface Water Management, and not the Health District.

Very good. And who...

Yeah, the Health District is a different...

...do you think the sanitarians work for?

Oh, yeah.

That's, I mean, that's why when we got to that section, it's like...

I didn't even think about that, either. Yeah.

And when did the government start taking over individual rights and responsibilities for the homeowner? Doesn't a septic system belong to the individual? Until you invite them in?

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

This thing is kind of like deceptive, and you think that you're getting something, but what you're actually doing is inviting something else.

It's called bait and switch.

Can you explain? What is this? I'm still confused from this one and the other topic and everything. A sanitation person. What is -- what clout do they have? What kind of -- can they -- what is this person?

They're a person that's trying to, in my opinion, once I saw the health district, I would think that's someone coming and trying to get me to switch to sewer. That's what I see.

But if you don't have sewers available, then they can't make you switch.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

And the more they're building, the more it's going to be available.

Oh, it's going to be miles and years before they're out near us.

Where I live, we're still on wells.

Yeah, we're on a well.

Yeah, I'm on a well.

And that's, okay, that's an excellent point that Tom brings up when he says, "I'm on a well." And it would have my vote of confidence to bring it to the attention of every homeowner that has an active septic system that, A) isn't working properly. You know, this stigma of bringing a government individual to your home or something is one thing. But the problem is that for these other people that are all on a well, when you start to have the surface water being contaminated like they've had on the shorelines and everything all around, you know, look at Hood Canal. Down in [unintelligible] Island we did a number of homes down there, and it's all septic, but they made them, you know, tear up the old septic. Everything, once these septic start to fail, and they fail for one reason. They fail for lack of maintenance. What goes in has got to come out. It's either going to come out the leach field or it's going to come out [unintelligible], but it's going to come out.

What's that got to do with having a sanitarian come out?

What is a sanitarian?

I agree with Rick on that point, a sanitarian, but somebody that has a degree of expertise in what's going on, whether he's employed by the county or not is another situation. I would prefer to see...

That would be the installer or your drainfield...

Or like he said [unintelligible].

Right, right. I would prefer to see that in that regard.

So the point of this is just information, then. I mean...

What is the...

**I can't tell you.**

You don't know.

He doesn't know. Remember, he's biased. Or nonbiased.

**Totally unbiased, because I don't know.**

Because the word sanitarian...

Yeah, it kind of gives me the eebie-jeebies there.

It's not something you look up in the phone book.

And if other people had the same reaction as Rick, this says, "Free visit from your Snohomish Health District sanitarian," so that's...

You know, I think we're...

...the Health District, the Health Department, is that -- that's the main reason, because we've had to call them for water and other issues before.

The Health Department is not on 3000 Rockefeller. It's down on Rucker. They're two totally separate...

Right. So then...

But I think we're equating apples and oranges here. I think the Health District is under the auspices of Surface Water Management.

That is true. A portion of it.

Surface Water Management has taken over the Health Department is basically what it amounts to.

That doesn't make sense, because...

They're a division of.

...the Health Department -- disease, and the nurses, all things. It's more than water.

That's true.

Well, maybe they're just supervising this part of it.

That's why I asked the question. The medical community in that...

**Let me ask this, because it's clearly an issue. Why is it important? Why is it so important who's the Health District and who's the county and who's what? Why is it so -- has so much energy at this table?**

Because I think everyone here is saying your septic system is different. People are concerned that somebody is going to come in and tell them that they have to change their septic system or upgrade it or change it at a cost to the homeowner and...

And you don't have a choice.

...you don't have a choice. Therefore...

And once they know, you don't. You don't have a choice.

...once these people come in, and they make a designation, you are stuck.

They have a hammer of authority and they use it.

And they can take that grandfather clause and go right out the window [unintelligible].

So that's the concern I think everybody here is expressing.

**Yeah, very loud and clear.**

And you make a choice to either be part, you know, get -- pull away from the government a little bit by having a septic system...

And/or well.

...or a well, or whatever you decide, you're off the grid a little bit, and you're doing something that you don't want the government to be involved with. It's your own decision. And then, someone comes in and goes, "Look, I just inspected it. It's not your decision anymore. You're going to do it this way."

Once you invite them in, that's that.

That's it. Your decisions are gone. Whatever you decided is gone.

Well, here's another point, too, is, you know, when you build a house, you have to go through the permit process to get the house, you know, the permits to build the house. You have to go through the county health department to get the septic permits to build the house. And if you can't get the permit or you don't do it the way they want you to do it, you're not going to get the permit. And if you don't get the thing done the way they want you to do it, you're not going to get the financing that you need to get. That's what happened to the neighbor behind me.

**So I'm going to assume that if you got this in the mail...**

I would throw it away, because I know that we already take care of our system.

**So you know that the septic care is up to you.**

It would be interesting to take some of this information about what this person's job does and what...

I was going to say, I'm actually, yeah, [unintelligible] curious as to what a sanitarian is.

What is it?

Yeah, and who do they work for?

And explain that they will make suggestions but that, you know...

I would like to find out more about that guy.

Yeah, I think clarifying that would make a big difference for anyone wanting to sign up for this program.

**What if there was sanitarians [unintelligible] the eebie-jeebies that were -- what if it was an environmental engineer?**

[Laughter]

That's even worse. I'm sorry.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Your local septic service company.

I'd say local septic service company, but apparently that's not what they're wanting. They're wanting you to use them.

I think if you want somebody to be interested in doing this, you've got to tell them what's in it for them. What's this person going to do?

If I got this in the mail I would check the one "Put me on your mailing list for classes and workshops" because I'm a single woman I know zipo about things like this, and I would go to a class or a workshop. I would probably not invite someone to come to my house because of the general mistrust of them telling me I have to do \$10,000 worth of work, but I would go to a class or a workshop where I could get information.

See, even down here, it says in little print "Appointments are limited. Don't delay. A septic system house call does not include tank inspection or pumping." So is this person just trying to educate you? And that's fine, if that's the case, but then if that's it, then that should be either...

The line above says you'll "learn essential practices to keep your septic system functioning properly for years to come."

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

My assumption would be that they're going to look at your drainfield and see if you've planted trees on it or something.

If this is an education tool, it's not very clear at all. // Yeah. // No. // I can understand they want people from the health standpoint, you don't want a septic system that's running over...

Yeah, that's true.

...if your neighbor is not taking care of their system then it affects your well or something...

That's true.

...then there's a problem.

I personally think that the county knows virtually every tank that is in the process of failing right now, just via the trips that the building inspectors make out, other county employees, surface water people,

there's a lot of county employees floating around our neighborhoods every day. And in Seattle it used to be, I don't know if it still is, but building inspectors used to have to make inspections from 10:00 until 2:00. From 2:00 until 3:00 they had to go through their district looking for people building without permits and blah, blah, blah.

That's close proximity. You're talking Snohomish County. You're talking Oso. You're talking people that are, you know...

I know, I know, I know.

...20-acre plots and...

But is a person in Oso going to really read this?

No.

They don't even get a permit for their septic. They've already got it in. They did a better job than the designed one that would cost you 10 grand.

**I've got some more of these I want to show you, so let's...**

I'd say this one is very unclear and does not do anything.

You need to clarify...

**How about this back picture?**

I think it's adorable.

I like the picture.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

**What does it convey to you?**

All it does is catch your attention. It doesn't convey anything.

**[MODERATOR: Mailer grading instructions]**

YOUR FAMILY	
1. Ineffective	8
2. ...	
3. Compelling	

**We've got eight ineffective on that one.**

**Let's try another one.**

Basically, it's the same thing with just different pictures.

Oh, there's little differences.

I like this. It talks about expense of repairs. Expense. For this time of year, where everybody is, it says prevent needed expensive repairs. That'll click with lots of people.

Yeah, that'll really catch your attention and make you think twice.

I think the back picture and heading make more sense. The drainfield rodeo doesn't make much sense, but, you know, your family, your septic system, get the connection, that makes more sense as to why that's picture is there. Yeah.

They're laying on the grass that the septic system is under. Your dog, your pet and your child, laying in the grass, yeah.

Like she said, the whole writing in there "expensive repairs" that makes you think twice.

Because it doesn't say anything about expensive repairs [unintelligible].

But once again, you need to say local sanitarian [unintelligible].

**I want to do it a section at a time. What's sort of the opening piece, it's pretty much the same. The only difference between this and the first one is the picture.**

Well, and the wording on the in -- yeah.

Yeah, I would still make this bigger.

**So the difference is the picture. Is this a more effective picture? Less effective?**

More effective. [Several]

**Why?**

Because it's got the family.

Because it shows you your family sitting there.

[Unintelligible].

**And the dog.**

Yeah.

**So let's open it up and we have the picture and the top two panels there. How about that picture?**

It's a nice place.

It's a nice place, yeah.

I think the investment part is a good idea.

I think this is communicating that much better.

That they're caring for us.

Yeah, the second paragraph, "The health district is committed to helping you maintain your system."

Once again, though, they need to clarify. What is a local sanitarian?

**We got that. We got the sanitarian part.**

This picture looks like a housing area with sewers to me.

**Yeah, [unintelligible] said there's no trees in it.**

There isn't a tree standing. I mean, did they go take this out in the middle of...

Well, it could be in the middle of a farm community.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

But, you know, in new developments, often there is not...

No trees.

They strip the trees, you're right. And the topsoil, and sell it back to you.

But they still would need -- they need some evergreens if it's going to...

You know, the Lyndon area, it's flat and not a lot of trees in certain places.

Yeah, depending on which way you're looking, you wouldn't even see mountains.

**And the bottom panel is the same, the return card, that's the same. Then, the back picture...**

I think that one's much better.

A much better picture.

I still have a question with the return address on this. If they're going to have a sanitarian coming out, why doesn't it go to the health district? Because every time somebody touches this it costs money. The county is in the hole now. And they're going to send these things out, that's double postage, and...

Because a sanitarian is probably from...

...why doesn't it go straight to the guys who are going to do it?

...Surface Water Management. Administration is probably all in one department.

Why do they have to send the sanitarian out? Why can't they simply learn about the proper care of your system by mailing you pamphlets or something?

This deal here. One of these.

Well, something with more detail than that.

Yeah, something like this.

But, you know, to shortstop this whole issue of bringing a county employee...

It's just like, "Oh, look, we're going to spend more of your money by sending this all over the place." That's what it looks like to me.

And the appointment, that's, you know, 15 bucks an hour plus gas and scheduling.

Boy that's pretty conservative.

Well, they're not going to send out the top [unintelligible].

I'm saying that -- he's talking about \$15 an hour for somebody to come out. I think that those guys get more than \$15 an hour.

If they want to give you a free inspection, why don't they send you a coupon that you take to your local participating service dealer?

Yeah, and give you a choice.

And contract -- see, that's a more trust -- people would trust their local service.

Yeah, I'm not going to trust someone I don't know.

Because as an employee you're paying for the employee and [unintelligible] perhaps at a less cost than sending out to different vendors who are going to charge different amounts.

Well, they would contract with the vendor for a certain rate.

And that would put money into the small business pockets.

Yeah, but then if those people you're contracting with, if there's a problem, then the...

Believe me, Snohomish County...

**So would that make any difference? It doesn't sound like you're going to invite them out no matter who they are, to me, right?**

Some people won't. Some people might.

Some people might.

Well, if I didn't know about my septic system I would be receptive to some type of very informational mailing. Something with some meat and potatoes in it. And this deal, they're saying right here that "we're not going to include tank inspection and pumping." [Unintelligible] why are you coming out here? You know?

He's going to ask you to inspect your tank. That's what it's saying.

That's not what they're saying right here.

That's not what it says.

Like, check off the box if you want him to come out or not.

But like I said, to my mind, if they just mail something and forget about sending some bozo, that'd make me happy.

Yeah, send you a pamphlet or something.

Yeah, Surface Water Management, that's a very new department down there. That just started about 15 years ago, 20 years at the most.

It just looks like it'd make work [unintelligible]...

I don't even have property that borders county property. I'm on a private road, and I still get taxed for it, the water runoff on my property, so it's like, "Why?" You know, a lot of people do it, because they're on private roads that are not butting up against county roads or...

But it's possibly draining into the aquifer or to [unintelligible]...

Oh, yeah, it does eventually. It goes through other people's properties and everybody gets tagged for it.

Well, something like rain is pretty hard to draw a line and say, "You pay and you don't."

I think the best thing about this is it doesn't mention money, I mean, it doesn't mention any fees to you. I mean, not saying I agree with this at all, but if I was to read this as some general person, I like that it doesn't say, "Hey, for \$5 or for" -- I mean, I like how they say "free."

Well, you're already paying into it.

You already paid for it.

Well, yeah.

You paid for the mailing, too.

What I'm saying, as a person...

This is area down here, this little print might need to be just a teeny bit bigger, just so that...

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Yeah, that does not include. It looks like you're trying to hide it.

I just think it would...

Appointments are limited. Yeah.

I think that would be nice just a tad bit bigger.

But like I said, they need to clarify sanitarian and what they do.

Yeah.

I think that would help.

**So let's rate this one.**

UNDER THERE

1. Ineffective
2. ...
3. Compelling

**Better than the first one, but [unintelligible].**

I don't know if any of us feel comfortable responding to the positive one unless the stuff inside is clarified. Maybe I'm wrong.

Apparently, there's one more coming, so let's see what that it.

I'm just judging the sheet on itself. It's not what it says. I'm just judging the sheet.

I was going to say, are we supposed to be tearing this apart or are we just supposed to be judging, like, our first reaction before we read all the fine stuff?

**Well, what I'm trying to do is to see what would happen if it arrived at your house.**

My wife would just throw it away. I'm sorry. I'm just saying the truth.

**That's what we want. I mean, I really appreciate the candor. That's what we're after, so...**

This is much better.

Oh, my goodness, yes.

Oh, yeah, 100 percent better.

**Okay. Well, let's walk through this one. There's a little different message on the front. I mean, we know about the logo. That's common and we've established...**

Hey, the retriever's back.

**...[unintelligible]. It's a different picture and a different statement on the front than the other ones. Is that...**

I think that statement is much better.

Uh-huh.

**What makes it better?**

It's a fact. It's not a question. It's not leading into "open me." It's a fact. Septic system care is up to you.

It really makes you pay attention.

It's ownership. It makes it yours.

I agree.

**How about the picture? Any reaction one way or the other?**

Once again, I think it's great, because it's family.

Yeah, family. I like the family.

I like the dog.

Yeah, I hear you.

Yeah, that's what we were saying, the retriever's back.

It's two generations. Three generations.

Again, it's kind of personalizing everything. As a family, you realize things.

I've got five granddaughters, so those five girls there...

**So how about the inside information?**

I think that's much better.

Yeah, diagrams.

Yeah, I kind of like that.

I mean, some people that know they have septic, some people don't even know they have a drainfield. I mean, that's like, whoa.

**So there's information there that people might not even -- that would be new to people that would be informative.**

Yeah, I like that one better.

It's too bad they don't take and combine some of these. This is so nice, because it's a visual, and some people are very visual. **Which one are you pointing at?** This one right here. The last one. But I still think this thing, going back to proper care, you know, of your drainfield and your septic protects your family's health, but it also prevents the need for expensive repairs.

Yeah. I think they need to say that again on this one.

It needs to be in here, somewhere incorporated in here, because I think if nothing else money and hitting your pocketbook...

It always is important, yeah. It gets your attention real quick.

...it gets your attention. If you just say, "Oh, it's all right." It's sort of broken, it's all right, you know, so it's leaking, big deal.

Yeah, so where it says, "A failing septic system is a serious health risk to your family and pets," they should probably include, "And expensive." I mean, it's expensive.

I had a question. The objective is to get the mail recipient to invite somebody to come out and talk to them about the septic system or just for the homeowner to get more information about septic system?

**Well, yeah, the mail-back card has three options. Only one of them is to invite the person out.**

Right. But my question is, this website that's listed on here, is there a bunch of information there about septic systems? **Presumably there would be, yes.**

I would hope so.

Well, maybe it could say that. Yeah, as an option, because some people are still going to say, "Well, I don't want somebody from the county coming out here to my house."

There's one other thing that really would be difficult, I suspect, but if an individual homeowner does not know what he has for a system, how could somebody come out and intelligently tell him, "Here's a potential problem?" With the various types of systems that are out there...

Yeah, you've got to find out what you've got first.

Well, someplace in here, if the county is going to come knocking, they ought to come down here with a little book in hand and say...

They're going to come with, you know...

Not necessarily come down with a copy of it. They may not, unless they're instructed to, because they're going to...

**Does the county know what kind of system you own?**

Yeah, it's filed.

It's all filed.

It's on file with the Health Department.

But like he said, if you've never pumped your system...

Yeah, you're supposed to.

...you might not have that report. I mean, your septic services have that report. They have that, too. But some owners...

No, they don't. They look feet outside of the 3x3 bathroom window in the back of the house that's right up by the tank. You're laughing? I've got news for you.

They should have a note on here saying...

So including...

...call this number to find out what your...

Yeah.

There you go.

...system is.

The informational number again.

**So let me go ahead and break down the elements again. We like this diagram.**

Yeah. [Several]

**It should say something about cost on here.**

Yeah, about it costing you if you don't...

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Your home and your property is your big investment. And if you don't care for it, you know, you need to do these things to prevent its...

[Unintelligible].

Yeah, this is kind of combining the two.

Rick has a comment again.

What if you're a renter?

You don't care.

Then it's up to your landlord.

It's up to the landlord.

This is a rhetorical question. Not for the group. Most renters, because I've rented places and stuff comes in and they toss it. Unless the individual wants again to take it upon themselves to notify the proper governmental officials that this is rental property, send stuff like this to me...

Oh, yeah, I wonder. I mean, do the owners get these?

...they can accomplish the same thing by simply taking this out to the small businesses, the guys that are going to have to do the repair and the tanks and the pumping and all the other stuff. This is simply a hook. And when they see your system's failing, you'll have a red tag. It needs to go through the SPA folks that are actually going to do this and stop tapping my wallet. And they can save all the cost of the mailing and going from Public Waters to Surface Water to the Health Department to the sanitarian.

This right here, yeah, people don't...

Chinese whispers. Little things change just a little bit each time each time they go out, and they get lost, and it's still going to go back to the guy I've been using since I bought that old farmhouse. He's going to come out and say, "You need new [unintelligible]." Do it. You know? It needs to be pumped. Don't throw this down. Don't do that. This is why. Here's the pliers. And they give it to you free, not out of your county tax dollars or your health district, which is a special tax district.

Which again supports your local businesses.

Yeah. You know? Keep it out where folks need the money. You don't need my tax dollar going since [unintelligible] department got cut by 75 percent.

So what is the purpose of developing this brochure and sending it out? What are they trying to accomplish?

I think they're trying to accomplish -- I mean, honestly, I think they're trying to accomplish to get people to pay attention, but once again you get back to what is a sanitarian? Is it really what they're trying to do?

I think it's a shovel-ready job and they're trying to give them work.

That's kind of what I'm curious on. What are they actually trying to do?

[Unintelligible] come out and inspect everybody's tank. And if they don't like them they can [unintelligible] and there's nothing they can do about it.

As Snohomish County continues to grow and there's more and more people and most of the people still are on septic systems, eventually there is going to be some effect to our water systems and wells and the runoff into the rivers...

Especially with the amount of flooding we have.

Can you say Bright Water?

What's Bright Water?

It's a sewer treatment plant that came down...

Right on Highway 9.

Oh, yeah, that big thing they're building out there. That's right.

**All right. I'm going to rein us back in. Tell me about this picture. Do you like the picture? Does it say anything to you?**

The dog's not in it.

I was going to say for some reason I like the dog one better.

I don't have children, but I have dogs.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

**Okay, well, let's rate this one.**

DOG & BOY	
1. Ineffective	
2. ...	8
3. Compelling	

**Eight 2s.**

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

I don't like my tax money going to paper stuff like this.

I was going to say, if you put one big note on there, put taxpayers do not like postage-paid paper.

I'm hearing it.

There's no dog on this one.

No cat, either.

Yeah, there's no kitty.

I don't like this one. This picture. I don't like it.

**We know the drill. "An important message about your septic system." That's a slightly different message than the others. Is it more effective or less effective or...**

Less. [Several]

**And the picture?**

Less effective.

They're not in your backyard. This a public park.

I was going to say, this is not something that looks realistic. There's no dog, there's no big family.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

"Get the connection" sounds almost like connect to the sewer.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

**So inside, the picture on the top and the statement up there?**

I like the other pictures better.

Yeah.

I like the old house.

The toilet's a little disturbing.

Yeah, I don't like it.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

We need the dog on this one.

The dog should be drinking out of it.

But this is kind of interesting. They actually pick a number of approximately the number of homes that are on a septic system, and I'm not sure within the county what the total number of single-family residences are in comparison to the 78,000.

I think it's great that they say, "Learn simple actions your family can take to keep your system healthy at ww -- that's what we were saying about this one."

There's about 250,000 homes in the county.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

But when you stop and think 78,000 for all the rural areas that we've got, I mean, I'm not so sure that that's not a bogus number.

And I think this kind of meets the renters' needs right here, kind of like he was saying, after all, if you're not caring for it, who is? If you're a renter and read that, you're going to go, "Oh, who is caring for my septic system?"

The problem is that a renter probably wouldn't even look that far.

Oh, probably not, huh? Would you, if you were renting, look at it, either?

I would, if I was a renter.

Well, if you're a renter.

**How about the picture on the back?**

No, no.

Once again, you look like you're in a park.

I think she had a good point that she doesn't have children but she has dogs, and if you have dogs it makes you think about your pets. None of these pictures have a dog.

Not everyone has children.

Which of these four pictures, if we ask instead of each individual, can we vote like which of the four pictures?

**Yeah, we will, but I want to do an individual one on this one, first.**

DRAINFIELD RODEO	
1. Ineffective	4
2. ...	6
3. Compelling	1

**Four 1s, six 2s, and a 3.**

**Of the four, which of the four do you think is most effective?**

Which is your favorite?	
1. Your Family	1
2. Under There	4
3. Dog & Boy	3
4. Drainfield Rodeo	0

**Well, let's do the insides. I've got to set this up here.**

Which is your favorite?	
1. Your Family	2
2. Under There	8
3. Dog & Boy	1
4. Drainfield Rodeo	0

**So it is a possible mix-and-match situation.**

**Okay. Now, we're going to do the lightning round.**

Is there any possibility that they would enclose this document or something similar to it inside this so it would be one mailing?

I think that's why they have that website, because like I said, remember, they finally actually said, "For information on your septic," you could go to that website. They actually said -- which card was that?

The website's on all of them.

But not everybody has access to the internet.

I just thought if you're going to mail something, why not tuck something else in it and give them some education, like give them a taste, rather than...

If you're going to do it, you might as well just tuck it in there.

Yeah, might as well just tuck it in there. More bang for your buck, right?

Not necessarily. It may be a bulk mailing issue.

But at least it gives you educational material right off the bat, so it kind of leads you to think, "Wow, maybe there's more."

You know, I've gotten something like this in the mail from a septic tank company, and... **Did you keep it?** Yeah. Well, I don't have it now, but I did [unintelligible].

**We're going to do taglines, like a line that you might see here or a line that you might see on the front. Something like that. Just kind of quick slogans.**

**[MODERATOR: Exercise explanation]**

Septic problems stink	
1. Ineffective	5
2. ...	3
3. Compelling	3

Flushing is only the beginning	
1. Ineffective	7
2. ...	
3. Compelling	

Don't let septic system drain your wallet	
1. Ineffective	0
2. ...	5
3. Compelling	6

Your septic system may be out of sight but it shouldn't be out of mind	
1. Ineffective	3
2. ...	4
3. Compelling	4

You've got a big investment out there	
1. Ineffective	2
2. ...	4
3. Compelling	5

How healthy is your septic system?		
1. Ineffective		
2. ...		5
3. Compelling		

**Kind of a bell-shaped curve. Five 2s and even numbers on the out sides.**

Septic systems and the environment—it's all connected		
1. Ineffective		4
2. ...		4
3. Compelling		3

Extend the life of your septic system		
1. Ineffective		5
2. ...		0
3. Compelling		6

The care and feeding of your septic system		
1. Ineffective		5
2. ...		3
3. Compelling		3

Care for your septic system, septic tank, and drainfield		
1. Ineffective		2
2. ...		7
3. Compelling		2

A plug for keeping your drainfield unplugged		
1. Ineffective		2
2. ...		4
3. Compelling		5

Septic system care is up to you		
1. Ineffective		
2. ...		4
3. Compelling		7

Keep your septic bugs happy		
1. Ineffective		6
2. ...		
3. Compelling		2

Protect your investment		
1. Ineffective		
2. ...		5
3. Compelling		4

Don't lose precious dollars down the drain		
1. Ineffective		0
2. ...		5
3. Compelling		5

What happens after you flush?	
1. Ineffective	5
2. ...	4
3. Compelling	2

Does your home have a dirty secret?	
1. Ineffective	8
2. ...	
3. Compelling	

A healthy home needs a healthy septic system	
1. Ineffective	
2. ...	3
3. Compelling	8

Septic system care depends on you	
1. Ineffective	
2. ...	
3. Compelling	10

Your family, your septic system—get the connection?	
1. Ineffective	7
2. ...	4
3. Compelling	

How's your septic system?	
1. Ineffective	2
2. ...	7
3. Compelling	

Care for your septic system	
1. Ineffective	3
2. ...	7
3. Compelling	

I'm shocked.

[Laughter]

**Which one are you going to remember tomorrow?**

Which slogan? I was going to say the investment, protect your investment. Or the septic care. Your septic system care depends on you.

Yeah, that one.

Money and ownership.

I agree.

**Any others? Any of them [unintelligible]?**

I think anytime they tried to apply humor is just stupid. Honestly, maybe if you were trying to get my kid to not flush things down the toilet, maybe for them that would work, but for me it really just made me go, "That's just stupid." Any time they were like "flush it" and...

The one that says, "Does your home have a dirty secret?" Nobody likes to think that they're home has a dirty secret.

Yeah, that one was really a turn off.

Yeah, it's a real turn off.

So was the flush -- where you flush starts or when -- whatever...

The flush is only the start.

Yeah, that was, yeah. Those were probably the two worst ones.

**Several of you mentioned or pointed to the website, so here are some potential website names.**

**[MODERATOR: Website handouts]**

Anything that's too long, like septic.snohomishcounty.health.information -- oh, too long.

It's got to be short and sweet. Something that people cannot have to be putting in forever.

I think the one that tells you exactly what it is, is septic care.

That's exactly what I was going to say. Septic care is short...

I mean, it's straight to the point and it doesn't mention health department county, Snohomish, it's just septic care dot and that's the one you're going to want to go to.

Or the safe septic.

Or the safe one, yeah.

Yeah, safe septic, yeah.

Or even myseptic.info works.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Yeah, the shorter, the better.

That's short and to the point.

Ideally, you would want septic first, because people, if they don't know and they're just typing, they'll type in "septic."

Yeah, that would probably be the first one.

Yeah, so probably septic care, yeah.

Yeah, ideally.

Well, you also want to do a lot of combining to the search, so if someone just types in "septic," they'll get that in there.

They'll get septic care instead of my septic.

You'd also want to have a lot of misspellings, because a lot of people will misspell it.

**Any other comments on any of them?**

Number 5 is just too long.

Yeah, it's just way too long.

Anytime you get over, like, a lot, you just kind of, like, stop wanting to type anymore. Come on, am I getting this right? I don't know.

Backslash [unintelligible] it's like, oh, please.

**Okay, vote on which one you like best.**

1. www. septicinfo.info	0
2. www. septichealth.info	0
3. www. septiccare.info	7
4. www. septicssystemcare.info	0
5. www. septic.snohomishhealth.info	0
6. www. myseptic.info	0
7. www. mysepticssystem.info	0
8. www. healthyseptic.info	0
9. www. safeseptic.info	0

**Number 3, septiccare.info, seven out of eleven votes. Okay.**

**Now, you know, the suffix here, info, is kind of new. It could also be org.**

I don't think that would make a difference.

**Would it make a difference?**

Yeah, a lot of times it would. An organization gives you a bit more of an idea that it's more important.

See, now that's why I would use the dot-org, because [unintelligible]...

Dot-info basically goes, "I don't know if I trust that. I trust org a lot more than I would a dot-com or a dot-info."

Yeah, I would trust org more than info.

Aren't orgs, uh, nonprofit?

Yeah. [Several]

Why? Info is spelling out exactly what you're asking for.

Because sometimes when you hit info, have you ever seen stuff that comes back to you?

There are some really weird things you can get with info.

And with septic and info, I don't know if I want to see some of the stuff that might get sent back.

Yeah, that little search engine pops up, oh, my goodness.

**So let's do this. If you think org is better, push 1. If you think info is better, push 2.**

1. ORG	4
2. INFO	7

[Exit Chatter]

**[End of Recording]**