



Snohomish County Public Works Department

Septic System Owners

INTERACTIVE POLLING RESULTS

November 18, 2008

ER
ELWAY RESEARCH, INC.



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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings from an interactive polling forum on behalf of the Snohomish County Surface Water Management Division. The primary objective of the forum was to pre-test question and message strategies for subsequent survey research and a communication campaign to improve residential management of septic systems.

The forum consisted of 46 owners of residential septic systems in the county. It was designed to engage septic system owners in a structured, facilitated discussion of issues surrounding septic systems, and to measure their response to specific questions and messages.

Interactive polling is a hybrid technique that asks participants to respond to survey-type quantitative questions using individual wireless handsets. The tabulated results were instantly displayed for discussion and exploration by the facilitator. The discussion was audio taped to capture participants' comments. A complete transcript is provided in the appendix.

The participants were selected from a list of households in target areas designated by the county. Households within the target area were called at random and the person in the household "most responsible for home maintenance" was invited to attend the forum. Participants were paid a \$60 stipend to attend.

This report presents the results of the polling in charts as participants saw them at the forum. Where appropriate, the charts are annotated with transcribed comments from the discussion as well as by noting differences in the answers given by various categories of participants.

The interactive polling was administered by Elway Research, Inc. The questionnaire was designed in close collaboration with The Snohomish County Public Works Department and the Snohomish Health District,



METHODS

PARTICIPANTS:	46 septic system owners from target areas in Snohomish County
TECHNIQUE:	Interactive Polling
FIELD DATES:	November 18, 2008
DATA COLLECTION:	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.
DATA ANALYSIS	The results displayed in these charts are percentages based upon the number of participants answering each question. There were 46 participants, but not every person answered every question, so the percentages are based on different totals.

It is important 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.



KEY FINDINGS

- ◆ **Most participants believed that they were familiar with septic system maintenance.**
 - 8 in 10 claimed to be at least “generally familiar with their systems,” although only 1 in 3 said they were “well versed”.
 - The large majority said they were relatively diligent about maintaining their system.
- ◆ **However, many also reported practices contrary to good care or that demonstrated a lack of knowledge of their system.**
 - Over 1 in 3 (37%) didn't know what type of system they had.
 - 1 in 4 had never had their system pumped.
 - Almost a quarter said they had had problems. (Although this may seem proportionally small, it represents a significant total number of potentially leaking septic systems.)
 - The disparity between residents impression that they are familiar with maintenance and the reality could be a significant barrier to conveyance of septic system messaging (i.e. if people think they know everything already, how can they be educated about better maintenance?)
- ◆ **Health District viewed as helpful only for general information; Public Works even less helpful.**
 - The Snohomish Health District was the most popular source of information about system care, with almost half turning to them first.
 - Only 1 in 10 would call the Public Works Department.
 - Hardly any would call either if they had a problem (2% for each.)
 - Participants expressed great reluctance to reveal a septic system problem to a government agency, for fear of being fined or having their property condemned. This may indicate a branding problem for the HD.
 - The existence of government regulations about septic system maintenance was a positive motivation for just over half of the participants – it made no difference to the others.
- ◆ **Participants were divided over whether the condition of their system had an impact of local water quality.**
 - Nearly 6 in 10 agreed that there was an impact, including 1/3 who agreed “strongly” while
 - 4 in 10 disagreed, including 1 in 10 who disagreed “strongly.”



- ◆ **Nearly all agreed that septic system failure can spread disease.**
- ◆ **About 1 in 4 thought that concerns about potential harm from septic systems are “just scare tactics.”**
- ◆ **Different system types and advice seemed to cause confusion.**
 - Some had been told that additives were helpful and advisable, while others had heard that additives were not necessary.
 - Different needs for pumping, and the uneven existence of filters that should be cleaned caused more confusion.
 - The existence of different system types makes a concise education message problematic.
- ◆ **Most said that they are "careful" with what goes down drains, but there was confusion as to what constituted "careful:"**
 - 4 in 10 said they were “always careful” about what goes down their drain and another 4 in 10 said they were careful “most of the time.”
 - Comments by some that "anything digestible" or "compostible" was ok were countered with information about milk, ground up orange peels, and "floating digestibles" that caused problems in some systems.
 - Coffee grounds were perhaps the most debated.



SUMMARY

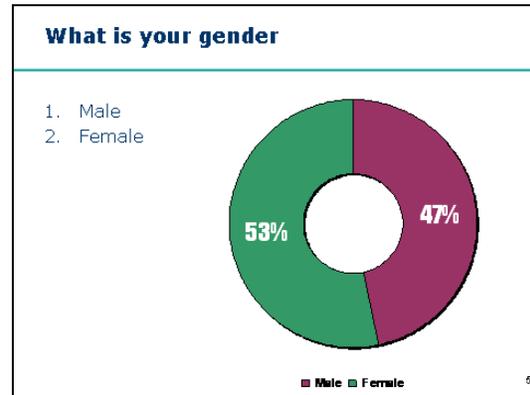
Interactive polling results are presented on the following pages. The charts are displayed as they were at the forum.

The charts are annotated with quotes from the participants and bullet points indicating differences between categories of participant. The quotes appear in *italics*.

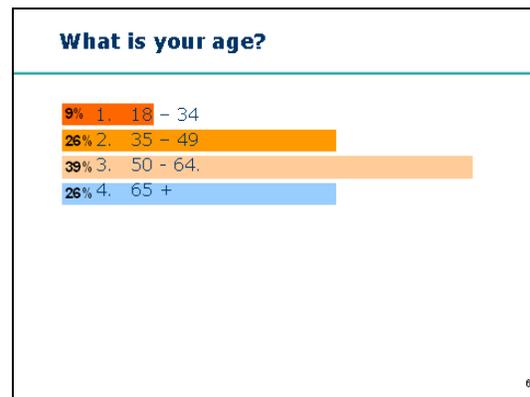


PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Gender

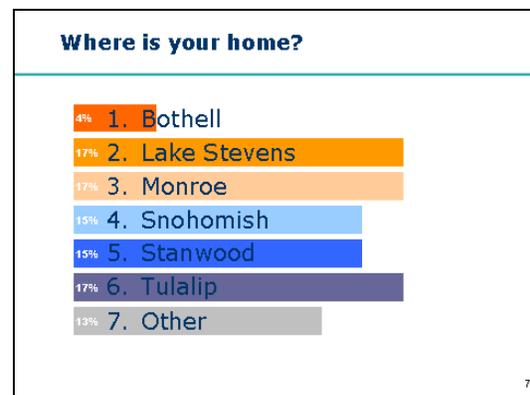


Age



Area of Residence

- Which town do you live in or closest to





Lot Size

What size is the lot on which your home is located?



8

Size of Household

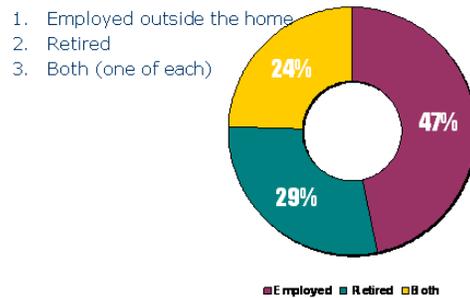
How many people live in your household at this time



10

Employment Status

Are the adults in your household



11

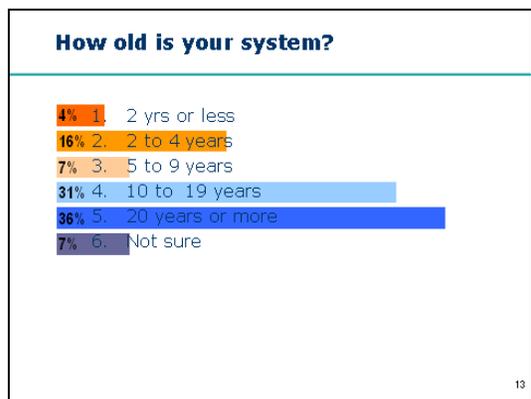


SEPTIC SYSTEM

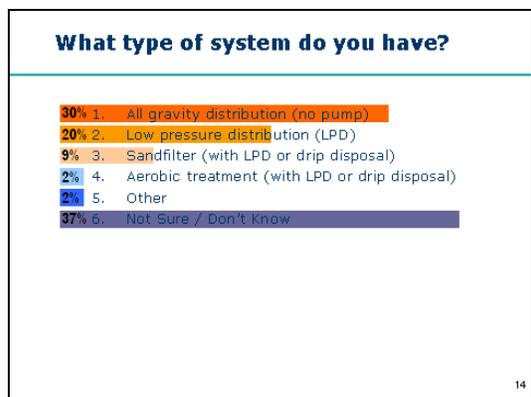
Tenure with Septic System



Age of System



Type of System





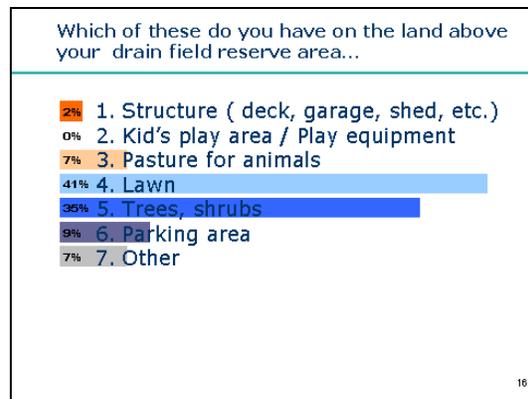
Nearly all have lawn or plants on drain field.

- There was initial confusion on this question about the definition of “above”. The question was re-polled; these are the results of the clarified question.



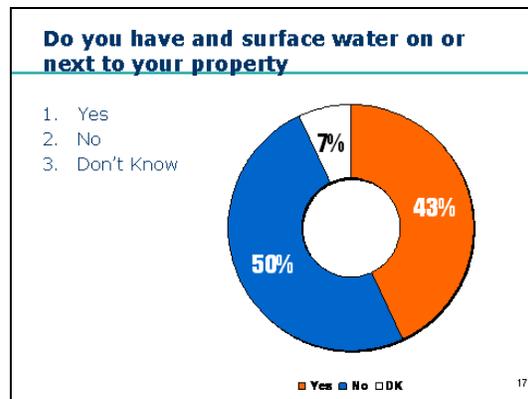
Most have lawn or plants on drain field reserve - some parking and pasture.

- Many were initially confused about what a “reserve area” is. Other participants defined it:
- It's the area, when your drain field you have now fails... it's the next area you're going to put your new drain field. So if yours is under your lawn now, and the only other place on your property is shrubs and trees, that's where you're headed to. Or if it's a pasture, that's where you're going to.*



Nearly half have Surface Water on or adjacent to Property.

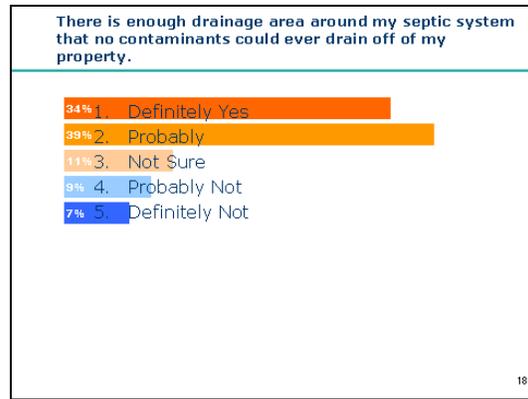
- There was confusion about the definition of surface water:
- Anything that stands on the ground for more than 48 hours is surface water..
- If it rained today, and it made a puddle in the middle of your yard, whether it'd be one inch or two inches, and it didn't rain for the next two days, if that puddle doesn't go away, Snohomish County considers it to be a wet area. Otherwise, it's called a drainage area.*
- The larger the lot size, the more likely to have surface water
- The older the septic system, the more likely to be near surface water.





2/3 said there is sufficient drainage around their system to prevent contaminants.

- Those who have had septic system for 10-20 years were least certain (1/3 said no)



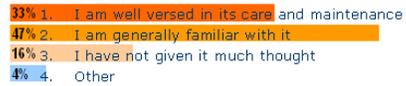


SEPTIC SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

1/3 “well versed” in system care.

- Knowledge goes up with experience: 50% of those with systems for 20+ years were “well versed” vs. 1 in 6 among those with systems for less than 10 years

How would you describe your knowledge of your septic system?



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Most diligent about maintenance.

- Diligence generally goes up with system experience: Nearly half of those with 20+ years experience said they were diligent, compared to 1/4 of those with less than 10 years experience.
- Those with gravity systems most likely to be “diligent.”
- I think there’s two different questions. One is, do you get it maintained, get it pumped out, and so forth? And the other is, do you take care of it by not putting the wrong things into it?*

When it comes to maintenance...



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Taking care of septic system: open discussion

- I have a powder that I put in monthly that is, like, a yeast mixture that helps to break things down, and then getting it pumped when I should.*
- We use liquid detergents for our laundry and dishwasher, so that they don’t cake up the drain field.*
- I inform my family and my kids what not to put in there is what I normally do. Just don’t be the only one who has the knowledge about the septic system; make sure the whole family knows, because everybody has to use it.*
- When we got ours, one of the things it really stressed was water conservation.*
- Another easy way to remember is what your body will digest often will -- I mean, your body does not digest eggshells, so don’t put eggshells down the sink.*



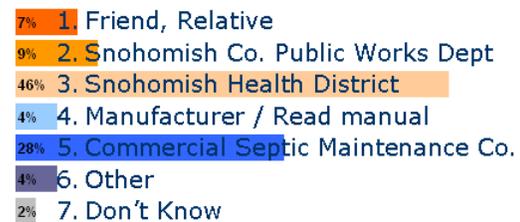
Indications of a problem with your septic system: open discussion

- *The toilet over-floods.*
- *When you flush the john, and it don't work.*
- *The alarm goes off.*
- *A smell out on the drainage fields.*
- *Standing surface water.*

A plurality would look to Health District for information.

- Those with more years of experience named a wider range of information sources
- Those with less than 10 years experience were most likely to call maintenance company (4 in 10).

Where would you go for information on proper care?



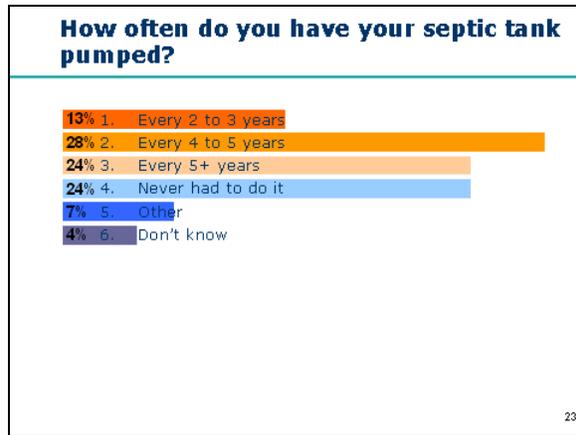
22

- Why was the Health District the number one chosen?
- *The Health District, when you call them, has no cross to bear. They don't get paid extra for answering your questions. They're professionals. They've been doing this for a long time, and they know what they're doing. They will give you the best advice that there is possible, at no cost to you. You can still make your decision. You don't have to tell them who you are, where you live, or anything else. You're just asking questions. The maintenance companies will try to sell you something that you don't need. That's what they're in business for.*
- *Well, the other thing about the Health District is they have to review and approve the plans for your systems. They also have to inspect it before it's covered, and do a spurt[?] test on it. So they really are in a position to know the most about your system. I, again, wouldn't identify myself if I had questions, because, yeah, you don't want them out there checking up on you, but I still think they're the best source of information*



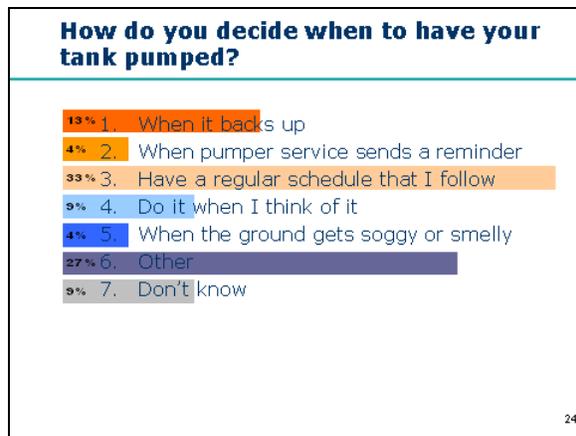
1 in 4 had never pumped system.

- 4 in 10 pumped at least every 5 years
- 2/3 of those with systems less than 10 years old had never pumped it.
- Gravity systems were pumped most frequently.
- *When we moved to Monroe, we were told everybody pumps their tank every three years. I said, "Why?" I don't know, but everybody pumps it every three years.*



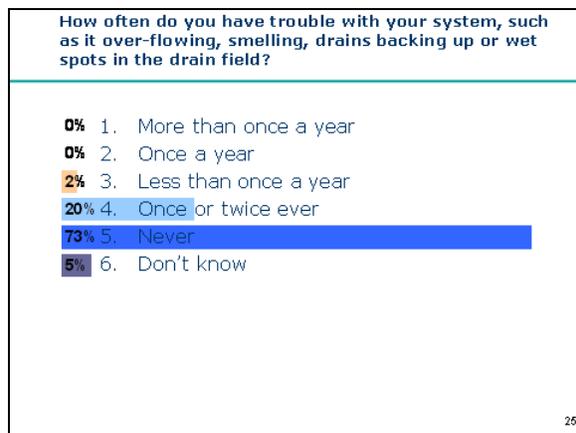
1 in 3 pump on regular schedule.

- Pumping on schedule goes up with age of system and years of experience with septic systems.
- 1/2 of those with 20+ year old systems pumped on a regular schedule.
- Those with gravity systems were most likely to be on a schedule.
- *I would never pump mine, unless I had a problem with it.*
- *How much do they cost to get pumped?*
- *But you're going to know if you've got a problem before the ground gets soggy and wet.*
- *I was told to monitor the depth of the solids collected in the tank, and when it gets up so high, that's time to get it pumped.*



3 in 4 had never had trouble with their system.

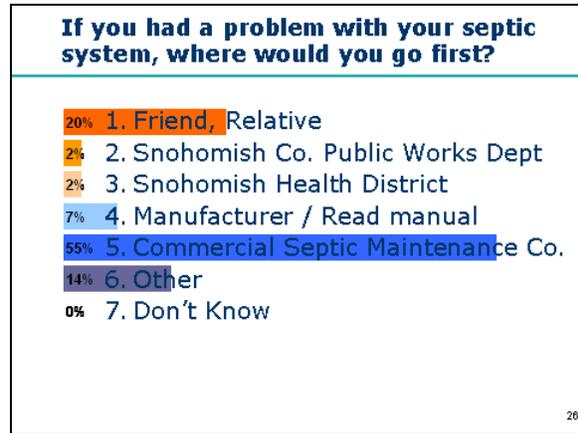
- 4 in 10 of those with 20+ year old systems have had problem.





Half would turn to commercial maintenance company if they had a problem.

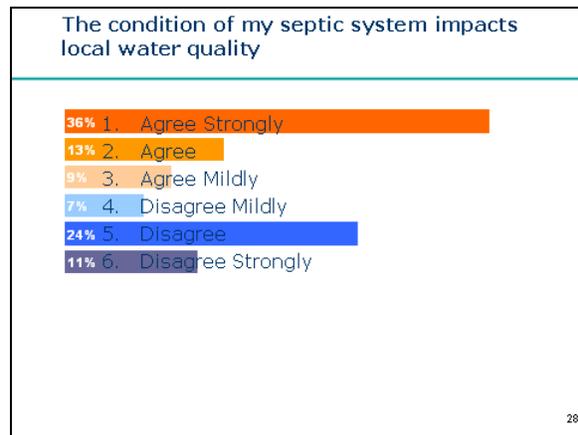
- 1/3 of those with less than 10 years experience would go to a maintenance company.
- *Because they'd know how to fix it.*
- 6 in 10 of those with 10+ years experience would do so.
- Some said that they would not call a government agency because they don't want the government coming on their property and "looking around".



ATTITUDES & AWARENESS

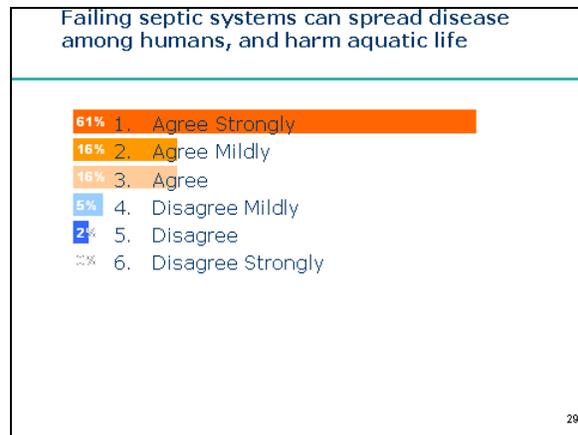
Split over whether condition of system impacts water quality.

- Most likely to disagree: those with lots of 5+ acres (1/2) those with 10-20 year-old systems(1/2)
- Baby boomers most likely to agree (2/3), while seniors least likely (1/6)
- *I think it could be taken two ways. One is theoretical; is it possible? And the other is, is the current condition of my septic system impacting it.*



Nearly all agree that system failure can spread disease.

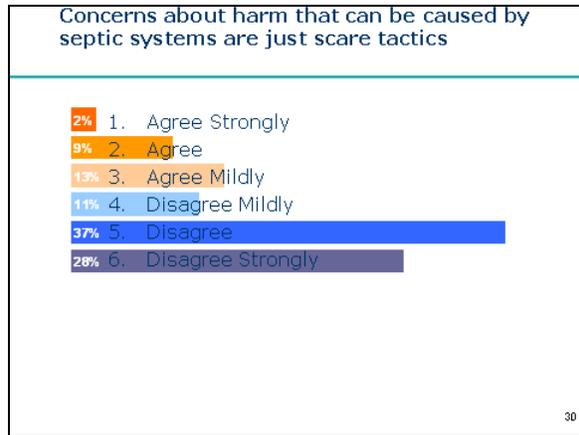
- 1/3 of those with 10-20-year-old systems disagreed.





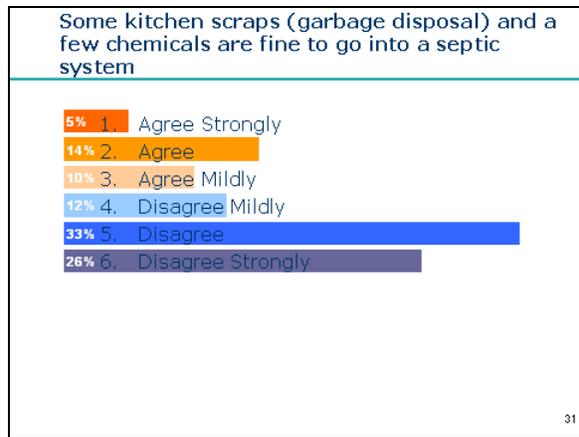
Most disagree that septic system concerns are “just scare tactics”—but not all.

- 1/3 of those with 5+ acre lots said concerns were just scare tactics.
- Seniors most likely age group to say “just scare tactics” (1/4).



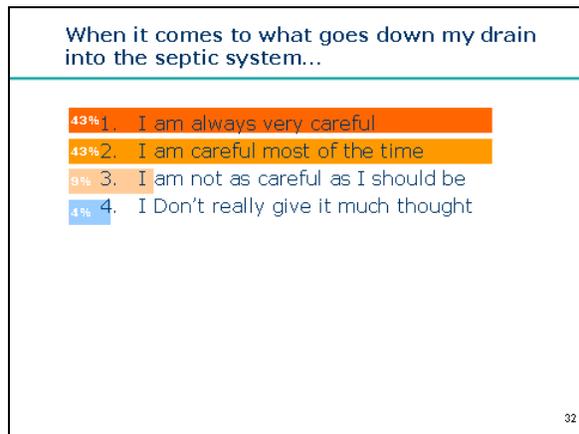
Most disagree that some food scraps OK.

- 1/3 of those with 20+ years experience said some scraps were OK.
- Youngest participants most likely to say some scraps OK (3/4).



1 in 8 not careful about what goes down drain.

- 1/2 of those with 20+ years experience “very careful” compared to 1/3 of those with less than 10 years experience.
- *You get visitors and people coming that aren’t used to being with septic tanks or system... who ...sometimes...dispose of things without really knowing what they’re doing.*
- *Or you have teenagers who aren’t quite as careful as they should be.*





What is OK / Not OK to put down the drain?

OK

- *Water.*
- *Soap.*
- *Liquid soaps.*
- *I put lemon down mine at home.*
- *What goes down the toilet.*
- *Most vegetables*
- *Things that go through the disposal*
- *Anything your body can digest*
- *Anything compostable*

NOT OK

- *Pills*
- *Kids wipes*
- *Bleach*
- *Certain toilet cleaners*
- *Certain toilet paper*
- *Chemical solvents, petroleum products*
- *Kitchen scraps*
- *Coffee grounds*

Proper care of a septic system involves pumping of the tank when needed; preventing solids or fines (like coffee grounds), harsh chemicals, and grease from entering drains; paying attention to water usage, and keeping the drain field clear and untrammelled.

- Most said this was easy to do

- *The thing about it is, easy or hard, it doesn't make a difference. Nobody wants to pay the bill when you screw up your system, and that's really -- You know, it becomes easy, because you don't want to afford the consequences of what happens when you disregard the system.*

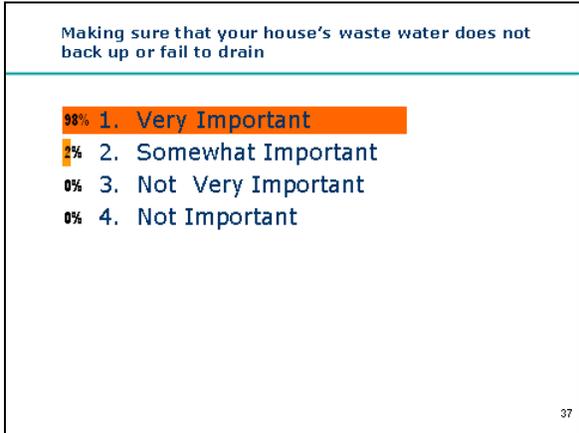


MOTIVATIONS

Several items were intended to assess what motivates people to take care of their septic systems. This section was not generally productive because nearly all of the reasons tested were “very important” to the large majority of respondents. Further, there was the suggestion that the items presented were not particularly salient to participants. As one participant put it:

The general thing is, is that it’s not even that you takes case of your septic system as much as the property owner you want to keep everything right, you know, because it affects your property values. And the septic system is part of that kind of a maintenance kind of thing that if you have a shoddy attitude, probably, about your septic system, you’re probably not doing a very good job on other things on the property, because if you’re going to cut a corner, the septic system is the easy one to cut, because nobody sees it

Insuring that waste water does not back up was universally thought “very important.”



“Keep yard dry” was also universally important.

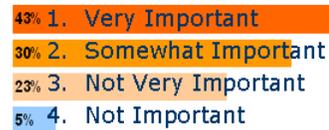




“Impact on neighbors” less important than other motivations.

- Most likely to say “very Important”:
Those with 2-5 acre lots
Those with 10-20 year-old systems

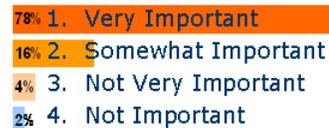
Making sure that the neighbors don't complain



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Protecting local streams “very Important” to 8 in 10

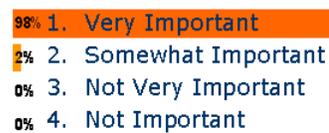
Protecting local streams



40

Keeping family safe universally “very important”

Keeping kids, family and pets safe

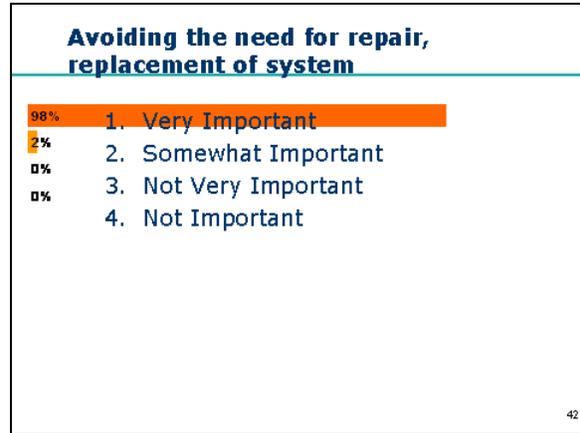


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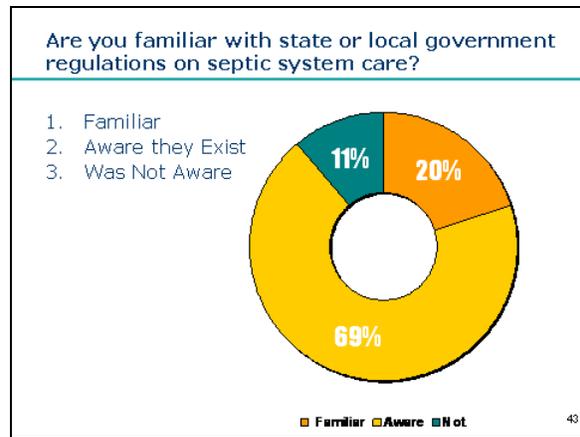
Avoiding need for repair universally “very important”

- *Well, my comment is sometimes you’re looking at taking proper care of what we put down the septic, sometimes I don’t think we’re really even thinking that far. For me, I’m thinking, “I don’t want to clog up my sink.”*



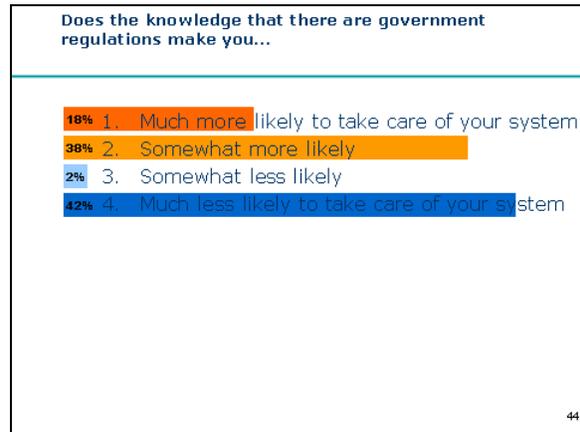
1 in 5 “familiar” with government regulations

- 9 in 10 aware that regulations exist.



Existence of gov’t regulations make half more likely to maintain system.

- *We want to do it for our own sake. We don’t care that we have to do it to make them happy*
- Existence of regulations have somewhat more impact on newer owners:
- 2/3 of those with less than 10 years experience said the regulations made them more likely to maintain their system, compared to
- 4 in 10 of those with 20+ years experience
- Seniors most likely to say regulations made them more likely to maintain their system (9 in 10)



Response #4 was changed on site to:
“has no impact on my wanting to maintain my system”



TRANSCRIPT

The following is a transcription made from the audio recording of the discussion. 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.





Moderators comments are in bold.

The transcript starts with meeting in progress, just after introduction

Which Came First:	
Chicken --	63%
Egg --	37%

It won't take our vote twice, will it? **It will override it.** Okay. **If you change your mind, it'll record the second one.**

So two-thirds of you said chicken, and a third said egg. That's pretty high; usually, it's closer than that. So I've been asking this question for about 15 years. I have a massive database on this.

Is that 63 percent for the egg?

This is a question we have taken to asking at all the meetings in the last few years. We didn't use to have to ask this. There's only one wrong answer to this question.

Is your cell phone:	
On --	30%
Off --	43%
Not with me --	20%
Don't have a cell phone --	7%

So 30 percent is on at the time. And, you know, before the two hours is up, we'll probably know who you are.

Okay. Let's find out a little bit about who's in the room, who you are. We have a few questions about you and your household, starting with another tough one, a two-choice question.

What is your gender?	
Male:	47%
Female :	53%

They get harder. No, they don't. It's all opinions. There's no tests involved.

There's no undecided. **Remember, I told you, if you want to change, just go ahead.**

So 47 percent. So this is what I call face validity now. I look at the chart, and I look in the room, and say, "Yeah, that's about right." The machines are working.

This is when I remind you this is anonymous and confidential. No one knows what your answer is on this. Are you having any trouble seeing in the back?

What is your age?	
1. 18 - 34	9%
2. 35 - 49	26%
3. 50 -64	39%
4. 65+	26%



Good age distribution. It's what we wanted to have, as well.

Where is your home?	
1. Bothell	4%
2. Lake Stevens	17%
3. Monroe	17%
4. Snohomish	15%
5. Stanwood	15%
6. Tulalip	17%
7. Other	13%

So that's good. Mainly, we wanted to make sure we had a distribution around the county. Just so we'll all know, somebody said, "Other." What are some of the others that were picked?

Woodinville. // Granite Falls. // Arlington.

What size is the lot on which your home is located?	
1. 1 acre or less	53%
2. 2 acres	16%
3. 3 acres	2%
4. 4 acres	4%
5. 5 acres or more	24%

So most on an acre or less. We've got bimodal here. About half of you on an acre or less, and then a quarter on five or more, but we have people on each of those sizes, so that's good, too. It's nice to have that good distribution.

Do you rent or own the place in which you live?	
1. Rent	0%
2. Own	100%

We're all renting. **It's more of a philosophical question, I guess.**

Okay. Makes for kind of a boring chart.

How many people live in your household at this time?	
1. One	14%
2. Two	44%
3. Three	23%
4. Four or more	19%

What was the other answer for own or rent? **100 percent owner.**

Okay, a couple of more. Nobody lives in your house. Okay, all right. Good. Again, good distribution. Mainly couples.

Are the adults in your household...	
1. Employed outside the home	47%
2. Retired	29%
3. Both (one of each)	24%

What happens if you're employed inside the home? **You can say "employed." Yeah, there are lots of other possible choices there, aren't there?**

Pretty good distribution there, as well. Good, that's just what we wanted.

Which color went with what? **Oh. Employed is 47, retired 29, both was 24.** Thank you.

How do you know that?

Because it's written on the bottom.



[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

There's some things we don't want you in the back to know.

Keep them in the dark. Yeah. Treat them like mushrooms.

Most of them go across the top, but if you can't see, let me know and I'll be...

How long have you lived with a septic system?	
1. 2 yrs or less	4%
2. 2 to 4 years	7%
3. 5 to 9 years	15%
4. 10 to 19 years	30%
5. 20 years or more	43%
6. Not sure	

You mean, on our property or our life?

Current septic system or in your entire life? Yeah.

Your whole life.

Okay. // Oh, my lord.

No. 5 was easy to answer.

Definitely more than [unintelligible].

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Okay. So most of you are veterans. 73 percent at ten years or more. So, okay.

How old is your system?	
1. 2 yrs or less	4%
2. 2 to 4 years	16%
3. 5 to 9 years	7%
4. 10 to 19 years	31%
5. 20 years or more	36%
6. Not sure	7%

At our current house? **Yes. At your current residence. Yeah, how old is the septic system at your current house?**

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

So pretty long, also. We have -- what? -- two-thirds of you, ten years or more with the system, except for some not sure, which is not surprising. Okay.

What type of system do you have?	
1. All gravity distribution (no pump)	30%
2. Low pressure distribution (LPD)	20%
3. Sandfilter (with LPD or drip disposal)	9%
4. Aerobic treatment (with LPD or drip disposal)	2%
5. Other	2%
6. Not sure/Don't know	37%

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

No. 3 takes in the [unintelligible] systems, too? **The what system?** [Unintelligible]?

Actually, it's the No. 4. **Is it?**

Is that aerobic? **No. 4 is aerobic. Okay. So, yeah.**



The men know. Women don't.

One of the reasons they have me do this is because I can be objective, because I know nothing about it. So I can answer...

I hazard that you do know something about it.

...almost no questions about septic systems. So about over 30 aren't sure what kind what you have, and then gravity is the most common of the ones you know. Okay.

Which of these do you have on the land above your septic drain field?	
1. A structure (deck, garage, outbuilding, etc)	2%
2. Play equipment, or a kids' play area	5%
3. Pasture for animals	2%
4. Lawn	68%
5. Trees and shrubs	22%
6. Parking area	0%
7. Other	0%
8. Don't know	0%

You can push more than one.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Okay. Yeah, just a grass field, we'll just call that lawn and grass. Nothing else; just grass.

You can do several? **Yeah.** And it'll take them both? **Yeah, it should.**

Okay, here we go. So for most of you, it's a grass field or a lawn. And then, trees and shrubs. A couple, just one or two, a deck or equipment or pasture or parking area.

When you said "above," do you mean... **I mean, on the drain field.** On the drain field... // Above. // ...or when you said "up from it," I was thinking in terms of the garage being here and the drain field being here. **Oh, yeah. No. I meant on them.** Oh, no, no, no. Then that's different. **On the drain field.**

Can we go back and do this?

You're talking covering them?

No. I mean, a drain field goes out here. Is there anything on the ground...

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

...on the drain field? So we misunderstood the question?

It's fine. // No. // No, I think it's fine.

We can do it again.

Well, lawn is fine. But I don't think the structure -- I think the structures are going to go away.

Okay. Well, we can do it again. We'll just re-poll that one.

Oh, but I lost my concentration. **I know.**

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

This is one of the things that makes this kind of polling so valuable. Because if we just did that in a phone survey, we wouldn't know that we asked the wrong question.

That's true.

So we get this feedback.



Well, see, they use the language. When you make your application, they want to know: What is above your drain field, such that you don't have a sharp bank above or below, within 30 feet of your drain field. **Oh, I see.** So "above" would be above the drain field; otherwise, in a different location. **Yeah, so it has different meaning...** Yes, it does. **...and connotation, and I just...** Yes. **Excellent.**

Over the top of... // Yeah, yeah.

I took that as the literal.

I did, too. I took it as literal, but...

That's really good to know. Okay, everybody in there then?

Yes.

Some people took stuff off of their drain field while we were...

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Which of these do you have on the land above your drain reserve area?	
1. A structure (deck, garage, outbuilding, etc)	2%
2. Play equipment, or a kids' play area	0%
3. Pasture for animals	7%
4. Lawn	41%
5. Trees and shrubs	35%
6. Parking area	9%
7. Other	7%

What does that mean?

Where it drains into?

I don't know.

I would think where it drains into.

Do you know what it means?

Yeah.

A reserve where it drains into? Where it drains into?

Do you want me to explain it?

Sure.

It's the area, when your drain field you have now fails... // Really? // ...it's the next area you're going to put your new drain field. So if yours is under your lawn now, and the only other place on your property is shrubs and trees, that's where you're headed to. Or if it's a pasture, that's where you're going to. **I see. Okay. Does everybody [unintelligible] that that's the right answer?**

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

In Snohomish County, you now...

Excuse me. I need to have just one person talking, please. The side conversations don't -- they're nothing in here. But when I try to listen to this tape, I hear five conversations going on. But I need just one person talking. Thank you. Yes?



In Snohomish County, you have to have a primary and a secondary drain field area; hence the term “reserve area.” Okay?

Pretty much the same. More trees and shrubs. More of a parking area. Okay.

Do you have any surface water on or next to your property?	
1. Yes	43%
2. No	50%
3. Don't know	7%

How close is “next to?” **Well, adjacent.**

Like, how do you define [unintelligible]?

So, like, down the street not, but your neighbor, yes. **Right.**

How do you define “surface water?” A creek?

Anything that stands on the ground for more than 48 hours is surface water.

Did everybody hear that?

Anything that stands. If you’ve got a puddle in your yard that sits in your yard for 48 hours, it’s considered surface water in Snohomish County.

Well, that’s everybody, then. **In November [unintelligible].**

That’s true.

Usually, you’re not talking the lake.

It could be a lake.

A lake is classified as a lake.

That’s not surface water.

Any water.

So “yes” is the orange. Half said no, 7 not sure. So about half and half. Okay. So then, the next question...

What is the timing? How long does it have to stand around to be considered...

If it rained today, and it made a puddle in the middle of your yard, whether it’d be one inch or two inches, and it didn't rain for the next two days, if that puddle doesn't go away, Snohomish County considers it to be a wet area. Otherwise, it’s called a drainage area [unintelligible].

Again, I’m sorry. I know that -- but I’ve got to be able to hear this tape. So I know it’s real tempting to talk, and again, it’s not very disruptive in here, but you should try to hear this tape. It’s a totally different conversation going on.

There is enough drainage around my septic system that no contaminants could ever drain off my property.	
1. Definitely yes	34%
2. Probably	39%
3. Not sure	11%
4. Probably not	5%
5. Definitely not	7%

So most say “yes.” 7 out of 10 say “yes,” but others, I think, probably, it might, could possibly drain off the property.



How would you describe your knowledge of your septic system?

1. I am well versed in its care and maintenance	33%
2. I am generally familiar with it	47%
3. I have not given it much thought	16%
4. Other	4%

Yeah, the thing with this question is I'm living with my parents, and they know about it. But I don't know that much about it. But I have been involved in helping to clean it out or do something with it. **So you're probably a "2" then, I would say.** Okay.

So generally, most people are pretty familiar with it. Now, the "other," just so I know, someone who said "other," what was that? I said "other," because I'm a tribal member, and if I think I have a problem, I just call someone, and they come and take care of it. **Yeah, so you know enough. I know the number.** I know the telephone number.

[Unintelligible].

When it comes to maintenance...

1. I am diligent about maintaining my septic system	38%
2. ...	24%
3. ...	24%
4. ...	7%
5. ...	4%
6. I do not worry about my septic system	2%

So what do you mean "maintain it?" Having it pumped? **Is that part of it? Just keeping it functioning properly, whatever that takes.** Probably knowing what to put in a system and what not to put in a system.

That's right.

[Unintelligible].

I think there's two different questions. One is, do you get it maintained, get it pumped out, and so forth? And the other is, do you take care of it by not putting the wrong things into it? **Right. And we're going to talk about both of those. And both of those are implied here, I would say.**

Did you all hear that? So there's really two parts to it. One is, having it maintained, pumped or whatever, and the other is being careful about what you're putting in it.

Exactly.

Well, how do you know what not to put in it?

Well, we're going to ask you that in just a minute. I'm asking the questions right now.

Judge Judy.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

So pretty conscientious. More than three-quarters up on the top half of that scale of being pretty diligent. So here's where we stop polling for awhile, and the question is: How do you take care of your septic system? What do you do?

I have a powder that I put in monthly that is, like, a yeast mixture that helps to break things down, and then getting it pumped when I should.

We use liquid detergents for our laundry and dishwasher, so that they don't cake up the drain field.



I wanted to ask about the powder you put in it, because I always thought you should, and I've been doing it for years. And then, I had my septic tank pumped, and the people that pump it said, "No. You don't do that." So which is right? **Yeah, good question.**

I know the answer now.

I do, too.

Yeah. The enzymes that are put in through the powders are unnecessary.

Pardon. It's not necessary?

Are not necessary, no. Because the deposits that you make are all that tank needs to do...

Well, that's what the people say that pump the tank, because I think they wanted to have more business. But we talked to the people with the powder that you put in, and they say you should add them. So I don't know which is right.

And you can find out from the Health Department. They can probably send you a list of things of what not to put in it, which would be protein, things like milk, dog and cat poop do not put in your tank. There's too much protein in it. The only things that are supposed to go in there are what goes down your sink. You know, not -- vegetables are okay, but not protein. And find out from the Health Department. They can send you...

I inform my family and my kids what not to put in there is what I normally do. Just don't be the only one who has the knowledge about the septic system; make sure the whole family knows, because everybody has to use it.

Taking on her comments there, the Health Department's pamphlet that you get with the system says that you do not need any of these, like, Rid-X or any of those types of additives. And so, they recommended against them.

When we got ours, one of the things it really stressed was water conservation.

Can I ask a question? **Sure.** How many people in this room have even cleaned your filter in a year?

What filter?

You've got a filter in the septic tank.

Where?

The septic tank has a filter?

Yeah, it needs to be cleaned every year.

So cleaning the filter. What are some other things you do to take care of your system?

Well, I just had my septic pumped, and he said you don't have to have that filter cleaned, because it's in the second tank [unintelligible].

One of the biggest things about your septic system is don't put any oil down your sink. **"Oil" meaning...**

Grease.

...cooking oil or... Cooking oil, any kind of grease, oil. It sets your septic tank system breakdown of the enzymes, it sets it back 48 hours per teaspoon.

The other thing, when we put our septic in, they said, "Don't put a garbage disposal in your house." // Right, right. // So [unintelligible] just goes into the trash [unintelligible].



Somebody said to not put protein down? Does that mean that you don't pour milk down the sink, if it's just milk? // Right. // Yes. // Where am I supposed to pour it? Just on... // Get a cat. // ...outside?

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Another easy way to remember is what your body will digest often will -- I mean, your body does not digest eggshells, so don't put eggshells down the sink. Coffee grounds...

But my body does digest milk.

Okay. Well, that's maybe going a little extreme. Corn, I mean, there's certain vegetables that your body doesn't digest well. I mean, it's...

So what happens if you do that? Does it just sit in the soil then?

It sits in your tank.

In your tank. That's a...

It never makes it out to the soil.

...it goes into your tank. It doesn't go out to your drainage field.

Here's the next question. How do you know when you have a problem with your septic tank?

The toilet over-floods.

When you flush the john, and it don't work.

The alarm goes off.

A smell out on the drainage fields.

Any other telltale signs?

Standing surface water. **Oh, okay. On the...**

On the drainage.

Same thing, yeah.

Any other? All right, good.

Where would you go for information on proper care?	
1. Friend, Relative	7%
2. Snohomish Co. Public Works Dept	9%
3. Snohomish Health District	46%
4. Manufacturer / Read manual	4%
5. Commercial Septic Maintenance Co.	28%
6. Other	4%
7. Don't Know	2%

Can you give more than one answer? **Yes.**

[Unintelligible]

Okay. So probably the Health District, number 1, 46 percent, almost half. 28 said the maintenance company; public works next.

So what's the reason you would call them? What's the criteria? Why would you call them and nothing else?



What I would do is talk to a commercial maintenance company first. And then, if I didn't like what they were telling me, or I wasn't sure and had no confidence in it, I'd go on the internet. I'd pick 6. Not as the first answer; I picked 5. But 6 is I would try to check it out that way, unless I had a friend or a relative that actually really knew something about it. **Okay.** Which I don't.

Why would you not trust a maintenance company? You said, first, if you didn't like what they were telling you... Yeah. ...and you didn't have confidence in it. What would... Just people, just they have a vested interest in moving into my bank account. All right? And if it didn't sound right or I wasn't sure -- I mean, there's certain maintenance stuff where, yeah, well, that's what they do. But if they tell me, you know, that you need, "X amount of thousands of dollars to do something," and I don't think that that's right, or I wasn't sure, I would go on the internet and see if that, you know, try to get the story that way. About the last thing in the world that I would do would go to the government.

First of all, they would have to get through.

Why is that?

Well, largely because, first off, if there's something a little bit funny, and it doesn't meet with their regulations, they're going to be all over me like a cheap suit. You know? And I don't want to red flag myself or my property, you know, because of some bureaucratic regulation.

So why was the Health District the number one chosen?

The Health District, when you call them, has no cross to bear. They don't get paid extra for answering your questions. They're professionals. They've been doing this for a long time, and they know what they're doing. They will give you the best advice that there is possible, at no cost to you. You can still make your decision. You don't have to tell them who you are, where you live, or anything else. You're just asking questions. The maintenance companies will try to sell you something that you don't need. That's what they're in business for.

Well, the other thing about the Health District is they have to review and approve the plans for your systems. They also have to inspect it before it's covered, and do a spurt[?] test on it. So they really are in a position to know the most about your system. I, again, wouldn't identify myself if I had questions, because yeah, you don't want them out there checking up on you, but I still think they're the best source of information.

I have a lot of faith in, I guess, my designer and the installer, and that's because the latest technology that just got installed in the last year, so it's a MicroFAST aerobic multi dosing system -- not that I wanted that system. That's what I had put in. **So is that the manufacturer, then? Manufacturer or commercial... One of those? Yeah, okay.** In between there.

Yeah, unfortunately, about eight years ago, I had a situation where I contacted the Snohomish Health District to try and get a house rebuilt that the septic system, they didn't like. And unfortunately, I was talking to the director, because nobody else below him would even answer the question. And his answer to me, after talking for 30 seconds, was, "We will condemn your property." And I says, "You can't do that." And he says, "Yes, we will." And he was just as stern as -- and that's the director. You know, I mean, it was terrible. I finally had to get a general contractor, and he was able to push it through, but it cost me about 10,000 more than what I wanted to pay.

So on the plus side, for the Health District, they know a lot, they have to sign off on it, but there is some worry that if you reveal or red flag yourself, as the gentleman in the back said, there might be problems coming your way.

Yes, right. [Several]



How about the Public Works Department? Much lower on our scale here.

They're road crew, mostly. Public Works? I don't think they deal with septic at all. // Sewers. // Sewers, yeah. And road maintenance. // Yeah.

Their IQ is much lower. I see.

And then, the commercial, they would know things, too, but they're going to try and sell you something.

Correct. // Right.

That's what I'm taking away from that. And reading the manual, that's the last thing anybody would do.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Get a manual? What? Do you have a manual at home? I don't think so. Is there such a thing? I don't think so.

There is, with the latest stuff.

We have a situation where we have a neighbor who, because of what they did to their property, we're winding up with water coming from their property onto ours, flowing over our drain field. And when we went to my manufacturer, he came out and was an enormous amount of help. Yes, it cost us some money, but it didn't really cost us that much money. But, I mean, if I could get my neighbor to quit doing what he's doing, I'd have it made. All right? The designer, my husband says, not the manufacturer. But...

How often do you have your septic tank pumped?	
1. Every 2 to 3 years	13%
2. Every 4 to 5 years	28%
3. Every 5+ years	24%
4. Never had to do it	24%
5. Other	7%
6. Don't know	4%

We just mark down what we were told? Well, no. It's 'have you done it?' How often have you had your septic tank pumped? Actually had it done?

Oh, I put the wrong -- I put No. 4. **You just push again; it'll override.**

Well, we haven't been in the house long enough. **Oh, okay.** So I just had never had to do it. Is that okay? **Sure. Yeah.**

Okay. So a quarter never had to do it. Now, the lady in the front, she hasn't been in the house long enough. Others, is that the case? Or just never just happens?

I live in Lake Roesiger, and as part of our water usage bill, we are charged a monthly amount. That monthly amount then goes towards -- it's kept track of by the county, I guess -- and once you reach 3,000 cu. ft. of throughput, they will send somebody out to pump it.

That's right.

But that's specific, I think to Lake Roesiger.

Is that a housing development? Lake Roesiger?

No, that's right...

I live up at Lake Roesiger.

Yeah, no. We pay for it every month.



I don't have that. I don't have that.

Oh, well, we pay for it every month.

Are you on septic? No, you're on...

Yeah, I'm septic.

I was always told every three years, you should have that done. And we're going on three years. Three years this year. **Coming up to that?** So next year, I guess you do it.

We've had ours for over 20 years, but I only recall possibly one time that we had it pumped, but I was not there. Some of the years, I was away at college, and so I don't know if that happened during that time.

I'll throw this out for information. I've got over 40 years on the septic system. If you've got a properly-maintained tank -- and by that, I mean one that works -- there's no reason to ever pump it...

That's what I heard, too.

...because it maintains itself. If you have a good, reliable pump service that you have ever used in the past, most of them are more than willing -- the guy that comes out on the truck is the guy to talk to -- they're more than willing to give you the information you need if you've got questions about your tank. With all the rain and all, our tank, the fuel line blocked. It just saturated and couldn't take it. The tank backed up; we found it out the next morning. You get wet feet, but, you know, it's clean water. But the thing about it is, when he comes and pumps the tank, there are certain questions to ask him. Number one, is my tank working all right? If he says "yes," then you don't have a problem with the way you're taking care of your tank. There's an outlying reason why you had to have it pumped. Nine years ago, when we moved to Monroe, we were told everybody pumps their tank every three years. I said, "Why?" I don't know, but everybody pumps it every three years. Well, it was pumped when we moved in. It was five years -- well, actually, it was, you know, nine years later -- and then we pumped it again, which was just last week. And I had to dig the sucker up. That wasn't fun. So I put a riser on it. Now, I can just take the lid off, and he can do his thing. But if you maintain your tank, and you don't have any trouble with it, there's no reason to pump it.

Okay. Well, that leads into my next question.

How do you decide when to have your tank pumped?	
1. When it backs up	13%
2. When pumper service sends a reminder	4%
3. Have a regular schedule that I follow	33%
4. Do it when I think of it	9%
5. When the ground gets soggy or smelly	4%
6. Other	27%
7. Don't know	9%

Is this multiple choice or just one? **One. Pick one. Yeah, all of these might be indicators, but which would you -- And I suppose if you never do it, you'd be an "Other."**

I would never pump mine, unless I had a problem with it.

How much do they cost to get pumped?

Depends on who you call.

But you're going to know if you've got a problem before the ground gets soggy and wet.

A hundred dollars.



Hundred? It's more than that.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Who are you going through, because mine was 400?

He asked the question about how much it costs to get pumped. [Unintelligible] is doing it for about 350. // 350? // I don't know who's doing it for 100.

So somewhere in between 100 and 350. It'll be 600 next year. **Yeah, get her done now.**

Okay. So lots of different reasons. Now, the other, we just need to make clear, what's in the "Other?" People were pushing "Other."

Well, I sold two houses in the last six years, and you've got to have it pumped, you know, to get through escrow. So that's my other.

Any other Others?

There's only two of us in our house, and I have a 1,000-gallon tank, with a 500-gallon pump tank, so I haven't pumped it in ten years. I just changed the filter four months ago, and it's still only at half a tank.

I was told to monitor the depth of the solids collected in the tank, and when it gets up so high, that's time to get it pumped.

You should monitor it every year you change the filter, and then you'll know.

Well, I came to this survey because of the call, and I'm the one that answered the phone, but I think sometimes if you're going to do certain things like this, you should say the [unintelligible] should come. Truthfully, I am involved in a lot of things around our property. I know where we put drain fields, and drainage [unintelligible], and [unintelligible]. But my husband takes care of the septic. **Yeah. I think the question was: Who's mainly responsible for maintenance around the house? When we call...**

That's a really good question.

But we didn't specifically say "septic."

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

We didn't want to tell everybody it was about that before they got here.

That's a really broad question. There's lots of home maintenance.

Yeah, I mean, I do tons of maintenance. We have a horse ranch, and I fix fences, I fix barn doors, I fix all kinds of things. So maybe they need to be a little more specific.

Well, no. That's all right, because what we wanted today is a representative sample. And not everybody knows all this stuff, and so it's...

Now, if I'm putting "Don't know," it's not because I'm ignorant of the fact or that I don't care. It's because... **You don't know.** ...my husband's... **And that's how I'd interpret it.** Okay. **No. "Don't know" is a valid answer. I always think that of any survey.**



How often do you have trouble with your system, such as it overflowing, smelling, drains backing up, or wet spots in the drain field?

1. More than once a year	0%
2. Once a year	0%
3. Less than once a year	2%
4. Once or twice ever	20%
5. Never	73%
6. Don't know	5%

Okay. Never, most of you. So pretty rare. Even the “Less than once a year” is the most frequent answer on here. Okay.

If you had a problem with your septic system, where would you go first?

1. Friend, Relative	20%
2. Snohomish Co. Public Works Dept	2%
3. Snohomish Health District	2%
4. Manufacturer / Read manual	7%
5. Commercial Septic Maintenance Co.	55%
6. Other	14%
7. Don't Know	0%

Okay. So a little different pattern here. The commercial septic maintenance companies or pumpers, over half of you. And then, friends and relatives scored more heavily. The Health District didn't score here; it was first for information, but last for “I've got a problem.” And Public Works was down at the bottom, too, both times.

So what's the main reason you'd call the septic maintenance company if you had a problem, but not for information?

Because they'd know how to fix it. **Pretty simple.** Pretty simple. **If you've got the problem, they're not going to try and send you something extra, because you've already got the problem.** See, I would probably do friends and relatives first, find out what their opinion was, and then I'd call to have the professionals fix it.

My son-in-law has a pumping program. It goes around places and pumps things out. So that's where I would call. That's a relative. **1 and 5 are the same answer for you, then.** Yeah, uh-huh.

The gentleman back here was saying to me, he says after my comment that everybody's now paranoid about them. **Yeah, you wrecked it.**

I took the commercial septic to be also the installer of the septic systems.

So why not call the Health District for this one?

Because they'll condemn your property.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

[Unintelligible] call information, and you don't have to reveal where you are.

You tell them you've got a problem, then you'd better be packing your bags or paying lots of money.

What are some of the others they've got listed here?

We actually have more reasons that we are nervous about any sort of government coming out to our place. We have a lot of cars parked around. We have some trash piled up and stuff, so my



dad has on more than one occasion remarked that if we had the government out to inspect anything, they'd condemn us on, you know, three or four different counts. [Unintelligible].

The internet.

On the other side of that coin, I live on the reservation here and have most of my life. I had a neighbor, his septic bled for over 11 years. The county would not come out, the tribes can't come out. I just replaced the mobile home. And since I bought my permit through the tribes, the county would not come out and recertify my septic, so it left me in limbo. So the county won't even come on the reservation to do anything in that respect, and they haven't for probably 15 years or more.

We live on the res, and we've been there three or four years, and we've had problems, and we've got the designer to come out. And we've talked with the Health Department.

But Code Enforcement, also. They've been out twice.

I have a new house, and the septic system is just four years old, but an alarm went off. And so, I called our Tribal Utility Department, and they came out, but the problem was not the septic system. It was the pump. I live on a very steep hill, and so they have to pump the liquid up, quite a ways up. **And who was it that came out?** The Tribal... **The tribe? Okay.**

The next section here, I've got four or five questions. These are going to be statements. This is not one; this is a sample. And I want you to indicate where you agree or disagree with each of these statements. And it's a scale.

The condition of my septic system impacts local water quality.	
1. Agree Strongly	36%
2. Agree	13%
3. Agree Mildly	9%
4. Disagree Mildly	7%
5. Disagree	24%
6. Disagree Strongly	11%

We have a well. Wouldn't we know if it's local-local water? **That's pretty local.**

So pretty split. About a third agree strongly, but we've got well over a third who disagree. And so, what would be some reasons to disagree with this statement? You don't have to tell me what you answered, but yeah.

The drain field and your septic system are surface-type units. Your septic system, saving for a few individuals in the room, are generally 150 to 300 feet away from any stream or lake. It's not always, because we've got some old systems around. **That's the regulation now?** That's the regulation now. And because it's surface water, anytime you're perking through the soil -- and a lot of this is evaporation, okay? Which goes up in the clouds and comes back down as rain -- but the water is not going to get to your stream, because in a direct course, unless you've got a channel going to it that's fatal -- Okay? So it's going to perk through the soils and the brush, and so on and so forth. Anytime that you're more than 25 feet with natural vegetation between you and your stream, you're going to filter out everything that's there. Okay? That's according to the Health District people. Also, anytime that you put in a well, your well is supposed to be 100 feet away from your drain field. Okay? Wells put in today are also blocked 35 feet from the surface down. They have a dam around them, and the surface water is not going to infiltrate on your water systems. So... **So basically what you're saying is, if you've got a proper system that meets the regulations, it's not going to affect this.** That's correct. **So if I was asking if the condition of the septic system affects it, it would imply that if you didn't have all those things in place, then it, you know, I mean, I'm trying to reword the question.** I doubt it. **Even there, you doubt it.** I doubt it. Yeah. **Okay, fair enough.**



Even if it backed up or something, it's still filtering out through the dirt. And the farther away from your septic system you get, the more filtration is happening. And so, whatever water happens, it would have to have some pretty strong chemicals in it to have the chemicals still in it when it went out to past a certain point. And most of this stuff is going to just filter into the land, and the land is going to use it.

I agree with everything the gentleman up front said, with the exception of the rules and regulations that he's talking about have gotten a lot more stringent, especially over the last ten to fifteen years. Systems installed 20 years and older didn't fall under those exact stringent standards. So I think some of the questions are a little deceiving, as far as both answers, I think, could be right, depending on what you're looking at. **So this will help us sharpen these questions.**

I think it could be taken two ways. One is theoretical; is it possible? And the other is, is the current condition of my septic system impacting it. **Yeah, that's what I'm hearing here.**

Yeah. [Several]

All right, good. Let's move.

Failing septic systems can spread disease among humans and harm aquatic life.	
1. Agree Strongly	61%
2. Agree Mildly	16%
3. Agree	16%
4. Disagree Mildly	5%
5. Disagree	2%
6. Disagree Strongly	

Why are agree mildly and agree backwards? **Because I typed it in there wrong.**

Seeing if you're paying attention.

Make sure you're awake.

Yeah, we're just checking. So Agree should be 2; Agree Mildly should be 3.

Okay. So not too much disagreement with that one, a failing system.

Concerns about harm that can be caused by septic systems are just scare tactics	
1. Agree Strongly	2%
2. Agree	9%
3. Agree Mildly	13%
4. Disagree Mildly	11%
5. Disagree	37%
6. Disagree Strongly	28%

So mainly disagreed, but some agreed with that. 28 percent, okay, mainly disagree.

Some kitchen scraps (garbage disposal) and a few chemicals are fine to go into a septic system	
1. Agree Strongly	5%
2. Agree	14%
3. Agree Mildly	10%
4. Disagree Mildly	12%
5. Disagree	33%
6. Disagree Strongly	26%

That's a broad category. **Yeah, it is. But that's why we have six different choices on this.**

All right. Going once, going twice, sold. Almost a third agree.

**The next couple of questions are about this:**

When it comes to what goes down my drain into the septic system...

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 1. I am always very careful | 43% |
| 2. I am careful most of the time | 43% |
| 3. I am not as careful as I should be | 9% |
| 4. I Don't really give it much thought | 4% |

That was quick. Okay. What's the difference between "always very careful" and "careful most of the time" in your daily lives? What's...

Oops.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Kind of throw it in the sink, and you go, "Oh, that's not really supposed to go in there."

You get visitors and people coming that aren't used to being with septic tanks or systems. You know, sometimes... **They're helping...** ...dispose of things without really knowing what they're doing.

Or you have teenagers who aren't quite as careful as they should be.

One way to avoid what's being discussed as far as visitors, I've got an old-fashioned strainer thing that you can put, especially in the kitchen sink, and I mean it catches just about everything. I mean, I don't put coffee grounds down my sink, anyway, but...

It catches coffee grounds.

...really even small food particles, and then all you do is lift it out and shake it in the garbage can, you know, into the garbage, and you get very little going down the drain, because it really fits tight. It's not like a commercial metal thing. This is an old-fashioned plastic, and you can get them. **Are they readily available?** Go to someplace like Ace Hardware, or McClendon's or the odd places... **With a lot of...** Yeah. **...inventory, yeah.** And either take your commercial strainer out or measure your thing.

And by mail order. They have them in those catalogs. **Do you get mail order same kind of device?** Uh-huh.

So we were talking about this earlier, but what is okay and not okay to put down a drain? Let's do okay first. What's okay to put down the drain?

Water. // Water. // Soap. // Liquid soaps.

I put lemon down mine at home.

What goes down the toilet.

Most vegetables.

What's not okay?

My mother passed away about two and a half years ago, and she had a grocery sack full of pills. I called Poison Control. I called pharmacies. I called all kinds of places. Their number one thing, "Oh, just put them down the toilet." And I said, "Wait a minute. The fish don't have a kidney problem, and they need it fixed." So called around, and I finally found a local pharmacy that said, "Oh, we have them taken to Bellingham, and they're incinerated." Perfect answer, but the government agencies could not answer that question, and I thought that to be totally ridiculous. You know, just flush them down the toilet. No.



Sell them on Craig's List.

The kids' wipes that you get for kids in the bathroom? Those are not -- and you've got to tell your kid, "I know you just wiped yourself, but don't throw it in the toilet." That's really tough to tell a seven-year-old.

I never did that.

I was going to say bleach.

Along those lines, I have taken note of certain things that say on them, "And don't put down septic systems," and it's got tampons, pads, and then the Kleenex. I try to avoid putting that down. Sometimes I have to substitute, if I don't have a roll of toilet paper in the house, but I try to limit that.

Wouldn't, I mean, bleach -- You can't put bleach in your wash water? Your washing machine?

Limit it. // Right.

It has the -- You don't want the -- It kills the good bacteria.

And certain toilet cleaners, you have to look at, too. You have to make sure you read the back. You have to make sure they're safe for septic, because there are lot of them out there that are not safe for septic, and you'll use it, and it'll kill all your good bacteria.

Generally, any kind of chemical solvents, paint thinner, any kind of petroleum products I think is not a happy thing to put into your septic system.

Certain toilet papers.

When we were having our problem, our daughter -- But we weren't really having a problem with it. When we had the designer out, one of the questions I asked him was about bleach for the clothing. And he said if you dilute it down low enough for, you know, if you're using it in a bucket of water, and that eventually goes into the drain, that it's the overuse of bleach that causes the problem.

Here's a list I found of things that are okay. There were four things on that list. Things that are not okay... Hair. [Several] Hair. Well, avoid as much as possible.

So the list, I mean, this is no news to you. The list of not okay is much longer than the list -- Now, does that seem like a credible list to you?

Yes. [Several]

Sounds like it.

Well, kitchen scraps, it's the things that'll go through your garbage disposal, save for coffee grounds and those kind of things, are fine. They break down quickly. They mold and create enzymes. It's good for it. **When they go through the disposal or just...** It doesn't matter whether they go through the disposal or not. **So kitchen scraps are okay, you think.** Yes. //

Yes. // Absolutely.

I think that certain ones...

Hands waving all over. Yes?

I've heard that if it's, as far as kitchen scraps go, if it's something that you can compost with, you can create a compost out of, it's fine to put it down, because it actually helps break down the things in your septic tank. // Right. **So if it's compostable, it's okay to go in the tank.** Yeah.



So, obviously, you're not going to put, like, chicken bones down your disposal, you know, but yeah.

Yeah, I kind of have to almost disagree a little bit with the coffee grounds. They take quite awhile to break down in your septic tank. // Yeah.

And coffee grounds are very compostable.

I think, just like he is, I disagree about the coffee grounds. But also, anything that floats when you run it through that garbage disposal, anything that floats, you don't want it in your tank. Even if it takes it four days or five days to start sinking, you don't want it in your tank. It doesn't take as much as people think to plug that little bit.

Other comments on this list?

I can give you a really good example, actually. I had to shoot my wife for running orange peels through a garbage disposal to keep the sink clean. Four days, she plugged up the filter, and that plugged into the first line of one in my drain field. And when I pulled it out and rebuilt it, it was all orange peels and stuff she'd been doing for four or five years, and didn't even know. **So it's compostable, and food scraps, and would decompose, and she thought she was doing the right thing, but...** But it went and floated right up over the top of the filter, and then right out, and then the first thing it did was plug up the first line.

And that would never have happened if you'd have done the housework. **Boy, are you getting (inaudible).**

Can I just add one thing real quick? What he's saying about his filter is not all systems, but most systems, especially in the last ten years, have a baffle filter on the outlet side of your tank that stops all solids from going into your pump tank or into your ground and drain field. Those need to be cleaned out, once a year is a good idea, and that's when you can inspect your tank. Not everybody has them. My system's 20 years old; I don't have one. I have a baffle T[?]. Okay? But the filter he's talking about saves your drain field immensely.

So the proper care of systems involves pumping the tank when it's needed -- and things we've been talking about -- preventing solids or fines, like coffee grounds, from going down there; preventing harsh chemicals and grease, all those things, from entering the drains, and oil, we talked about; paying attention to water use, somebody mentioned earlier, just the amount of water that gets used; and then, keeping the drain field clear, with nothing on it.

Is that easy, difficult, to do all that? As someone who doesn't have a septic, that seems like a lot of things to be thinking about.

Very easy to get used to it. // Yes, extremely.

You just get used to it, and it becomes part of your habit?

Yeah. [several]

It's like washing [unintelligible].

The thing about it is, easy or hard, it doesn't make a difference. Nobody wants to pay the bill when you screw up your system, and that's really -- You know, it becomes easy, because you don't want to afford the consequences of what happens when you disregard the system.

So that was kind of my follow-up question. What are the barriers here? What are the things that make this hard to do, whether it's our own habits or it's just hard to do? Or



what are the things that provide incentives to do it, like things that motivate you to keep proper care of our septic system?

Well, I think there's the two majors. The cost, and you don't want the county out at your house. Those are the two that keep me going, you know?

Sometimes it's a question of: What else do I do with it? Some of the things that we flush down the toilet, the alternative in our house is to go and [unintelligible] down the ground and bury them. Like, if there's a pot of rotten soup or something.

Yeah. So what do you with it? What's the alternative? Okay. That's a...

You put it in a jar, wrap it in a gift, put it in the back of your car. If somebody steals it, it's [unintelligible].

Or you can drive it to Bellingham. Yeah, they'll burn it for you. **Take it with the pills.**

What are some other barriers or motivations? Remember we mentioned earlier, you just get in a hurry or you don't always think about it? I mean, a lot of different reasons why you'd fall short of being the perfect septic maintenance person.

We have trouble with a lot of hair going down the drain. Actually, and that's another question that came up earlier, not to put drain decloggers? What happens when your drain gets clogged? What do you do?

Snake it. [Several]

Call a plumber.

The plumber doesn't always work.

Use a snake.

The general thing is, is that it's not even that you take care of your septic system as much as the property owner you want to keep everything right, you know, because it affects your property values. And the septic system is part of that kind of a maintenance kind of thing that if you have a shoddy attitude, probably, about your septic system, you're probably not doing a very good job on other things on the property, because if you're going to cut a corner, the septic system is the easy one to cut, because nobody sees it. **Right, until you get a problem.** Right.

Until you're trying to sell your house. // There you go. // You have to have the septic pumped and certified when you sell your house.

There seem to be some really knowledgeable people in here. And has anybody ever run into the situation where you have a neighbor who has done all this clearing and winding up with their wa -
- Ah-ha, good.

I kind of cheat a little bit, because I'm a licensed installer in Snohomish County.

That's fine. Good.

He's actually from the Health Department.

I mean, this guy's from the Health District up here, but -- Just kidding. It doesn't mean we all agree on everything 100 percent, but the basic idea seems to be they're between, you know, the homeowners.

Well, my comment is sometimes you're looking at taking proper care of what we put down the septic, sometimes I don't think we're really even thinking that far. For me, I'm thinking, "I don't want to clog up my sink." So something that's going to go down my drain that might clog up my sink, I'm not going to put down it anyway, because if my husband has to tear apart under the sink,



he's not happy. So I think a lot of times we're already thinking about the fact, "Well, don't clog the drain." **That's a good way to put it. You're not even thinking that far. It's just the drain; not all the way down the septic system.**

I remember pouring hamburger grease into the sink once, and it actually made this nice, little thing in the drain. It wasn't even down the pipes. It was just solid there. So later, I was like, "Wait a minute. Why is this thing not -- Whoa."

I'd better clarify a statement I made awhile ago about never having to pump a tank. I was speaking strictly to a gravity system. These newfangled things, you may have a regular regime that you may have to do it periodically, whether you want to or not. But a gravity system, which I understand you can't put in anymore, strictly doesn't need to be touched unless something happens to kill it.

I think that every set of parents, parent or parents, should teach their children about how to run their home, including the septic system if you had it, or whatever it is, and I don't think that we're doing a very good job of that.

Well, I live on a lake, and many times we'll have a large number of guests over. And the thing that we're concerned about is the overuse of the septic system if you get 50 people in your home at the same time. So a lot of times, we'll ask for a porta-potty to come out and set it, and just divert everybody to that, you know, just as a precaution. It's a lot cheaper to rent a porta-potty for one day or two days than it is to have some system problems later.

Are you on a pump system, or are you on a gravity system? // Gravity. // Strictly gravity?

For me, a motivating factor in keeping the system up and running is just the hassle. If it goes down, I've got four kids, it's going to be a big hassle.

Just kind of an aside, I mean, certainly one of the things I think about is I don't want to leave the planet filled up with my garbage. When I pass on, I would like to conduct my life in such a way that I leave as small a debris field as possible as a result of my being here. And while I don't think that that's, like, the number one concern -- all right, in some ways -- but, I mean, it's certainly something I think about.

Is there any way to test the quality of a septic field before anything happens? Just routinely? Maybe? **I don't know.**

That question came up in a deal with the tribes. The tribes can't come on my property and certify my stuff, but then the county supposedly has some kind of equipment. They can test the gasses and the soils around things like that, but being that they wouldn't come out here, I had my septic guy certify it, because FHA and VA home loan, and he was fine with it.

All right. Well, I'm going to go through a list. Some things were mentioned, but there's a list of things here that are reasons for maintaining your septic system, motivations for doing that job.

Making sure that your house's waste water does not back up or fail to drain	
1. Very Important	98%
2. Somewhat Important	2%
3. Not Very Important	0%
4. Not Important	0%



Okay. I've got another one here:

Keeping your yard or fields dry and clean	
1. Very Important	71%
2. Somewhat Important	27%
3. Not Very Important	0%
4. Not Important	2%

I want to know how, in Seattle, in this area, how you can keep anything dry.

That's a dream, huh?

It's a powerful dream.

Not enough to dry the field, though.

You can't keep your field dry, because it's the drain field.

Okay. I'll work on that question.

Well, maybe just clarify whether you're talking about under the ground or above the surface.

Are you talking [unintelligible]. **No, I'm sorry.**

So you're talking about surface water.

Making sure that the neighbors don't complain	
1. Very Important	43%
2. Somewhat Important	30%
3. Not Very Important	23%
4. Not Important	5%

Talk to them first when they're complaining. [Unintelligible].

Okay. Still important, but a little less so than some of the others. All right.

Are some of those other answers because they don't have close neighbors?

Is that part of the reason, or is it just that's not a big motivator?

That's not a motivator.

My response that it's not important is because if it became an issue where the neighbor was complaining, it had already gotten too bad, and that should be irrelevant at that point.

That's pretty much our point.

Good point. Excellent. How about this one?

Protecting local streams	
1. Very Important	78%
2. Somewhat Important	16%
3. Not Very Important	4%
4. Not Important	2%

Keeping kids, family, and pets safe	
1. Very Important	98%
2. Somewhat Important	2%
3. Not Very Important	0%
4. Not Important	0%



As a motivating factor for maintaining your septic system, not as a general way of life.

Avoiding the need for repair/replacement of system	
1. Very Important	98%
2. Somewhat Important	2%
3. Not Very Important	0%
4. Not Important	0%

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Boy, look at that. It doesn't count any more if you push really hard.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

So all those are very important. Now, if I were going to rewrite those questions for, like, a telephone survey, I mean, this is good to know, but if everybody says they strongly agree, we're really not -- from a research standpoint -- we're not learning very much. We need more variance.

So are these just so obvious that --

Yes. [Several]

So we probably don't need to ask them at all.

You could probably put them all in one question.

Are you familiar with state or local government regulations on septic system care?	
1. Familiar	20%
2. Are they exist	69%
3. Was not aware	11%

[Unintelligible]. All I know is if it works, everything [unintelligible]. If it don't work, I got trouble, in more ways than one.

So familiar, 20 percent; almost 70 percent were aware they exist; 11 percent.

Does the knowledge that there are government regulations make you...	
1. Much more likely to take care of your system	18%
2. Somewhat more likely	38%
3. Somewhat less likely	2%
4. Much less likely to take care of your system	42%

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

[Unintelligible] middle one.

Yeah, it doesn't affect my...

No effect at all?

Yeah, what do we care?

There should be a "no effect."

Well, because we want to do it for our own sake. We don't care that we have to do it to make them happy...

Well, let's do this...

...we want to be happy.

And this is obviously a kind of stupid question.



[Unintelligible].

[Unintelligible] much less likely, because of...

It's just poorly-written.

It's a poorly-written, poorly-crafted question. And I wrote it, so this is great. So let's do this. Let's say much more likely, somewhat more likely, and let's have 3 be no effect at all. So you can revote now if you want. Just push over.

3 is? 3 is it doesn't -- I'm sorry. We could still keep somewhat less likely, because you just want to stick it to the government. But 4 will be "has no impact." Regulations have no impact around me whatsoever.

Well, and usually --

I'm sorry. Much more likely is 1, somewhat more likely, somewhat less likely is 3, and then 4 is it has no impact on my wanting to maintain my system, the knowledge of these regulations.

Much better.

And usually if there's regulations, there's fees. You know? So I would prefer them not to have them, so that they wouldn't have to get some of my money.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

So good point. So 42 percent say it wouldn't have any impact. And for those that it does have an impact, most of them say, yeah, it does more. But what I was gathering earlier was you're doing it for your own reasons, anyway. But regulations, you know, they're certainly not a disincentive, but you do it for all those other reasons we talked about earlier.

See, out of that question, I got, you know, "Would you do it even if there was no government regulations that you didn't have to do, you know, would you still maintain your septic system?" **Yeah, that's a good way to put it.**

The saying in the industry is: If you take care of your drain field, it'll take care of you.

I would be highly interested in the government's regulations if they had the septic tank police wandering the neighborhood citing everybody who violated septic law.

It's only a matter of time.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

The tribe calls it the potty patrol.

[Unintelligible -- crosstalk]

Well...

You did [unintelligible].

I would venture that this is the longest time you've ever spent talking about septic tanks.

Yeah.

Are there other comments [unintelligible] or other question? Anything?

Who paid for this poll? Who's -- **The County of Snohomish.** Oh.

Snohomish County or Snohomish Health District? **Well, it's collaboration. It's the county. My contract is with Snohomish County.** Okay. The Snohomish Health District is a complete



different entity. **Yes, right.** Yeah. **But they're participating in this research, as well.** Oh, but they're a state agency, not a county agency. **Right, right. But they're collaborating, as well.**

Could you inform them that they should work together with the Tulalip Tribes? **Yeah, yeah. And they're going to hear that.** That was totally ridiculous. They held up my permits for three and a half weeks.

[Unintelligible].

This county is so hungry for development that they'll sell these regulations down the road any way they can for a big developer. All right? But little local homeowners, what we get is the shaft.

No, I wouldn't agree with that.

Well, I just dealt with a whole situation across the -- They put septic systems on top of aquifers. You tell me that that makes any sense. And it's not the first time they've done it.

Thank you. [Exit Chatter]