

Septic system inspections required

By KRISTI PIHL
Staff Reporter

Homeowners on Camano Island should be aware that they are required to have their septic systems inspected.

The state required all Puget Sound counties to develop a system for managing septic system inspections, said Aaron Henderson, environmental health director for the Island County Health Department.

Under the new regulations, all septic systems that involve pressure need to be annually inspected, Henderson said. That includes a conventional pressure system and all alternative systems, with the first deadline as July 1. Conventional gravity systems need to be inspected once every three years, with the deadline of July 1, 2010.

Inspections by professionals cost an estimated \$200 to \$400.

Conventional gravity systems are in deep, permeable soil, where the drain field is downhill from the house.

A conventional pressure system is similar to the gravity system, ex-

cept a pump moves effluent to an uphill drain field.

An alternative septic system involves a pressure or pump element and some form of pre-treating the effluent because the soil is not deep enough to filter out pathogens, Henderson said.

Generally, it is fairly simple to tell what system a home has, Henderson said. If homeowners can count more than three lids, they have an alternative system.

If someone is unsure about their septic system, the homeowner can call the county and request access to an as-built, which shows the type of septic system and where it was installed in scale, Henderson said.

The state Legislature has emphasized revitalizing Puget Sound into a healthier habitat. Studies have shown septic waste is potentially a large contributor to problems impacting the sound.

As Camano Island has limited groundwater, making sure effluent isn't entering the aquifer makes

sense, Henderson said.

The inspection of septic systems both benefits public health and the homeowner's pocketbook, he said. A new septic system can cost \$20,000 to \$30,000.

Things that can lead to the failure of a septic system can often be caught with an inspection and then mitigated to avoid failure, he said.

Homeowners can become certified to inspect their own septic systems if they are a conventional gravity or a conventional pressure system through the county's free Home Owner Septic Training (HOST) program.

The WSU Island County extension offers free Septic 101 classes, which is the first part of the HOST program. The classes are also available to anyone who wants to learn more about their own septic system. The last portion of the HOST program, the field session, does have a \$25 fee.

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