

# ...and Septic Systems

**The installation business is for people who are serious about their profession and constantly work to build their knowledge and skills**

By Gil Longwell



**Q**uality installation of septic systems – onlot or onsite wastewater treatment systems in today’s parlance – requires specialized skills, equipment and knowledge.

Quality installations are what focused professional installers deliver. Quality installations are not a sideline activity. Ask most excavators if they install septic systems and they reply, “Septics? Yeah, I can do that.” To many excavators, septic installations are an afterthought. Check out the Yellow Pages under the heading: Septic Tanks & Systems - Contractors and Dealers.” Even in this focused category, a typical listing would be: “Jones Brothers Excavating, Driveways & Septics.”

The listings for installers who focus their business on septic system installations are the standouts that catch the reader’s eye and draw in the careful buyer.

## Three toolboxes

Installation begins long before the equipment arrives at the job site, and it is not over until well after that equipment is at work at the next job site. The installation actually begins with the first customer contact, which is often over the telephone, or today over the Internet.

Professional installers are an information resource, interpreters of regulations, explainers of system options, and guides for landowners. The pros know the regulations, the regulators, the soils in their service area, and how all of these factors come together to influence the final job.

Professional installers have at least three types of tool boxes. Each contains a

different complement of resources; each enables a more comprehensive view of the job and a better installation execution.

First, the traditional box is loaded with laser levels, shovels, a transit, lime, string line, and more. Second is the cerebral tool box where practical experiences meld with an appreciation of equipment capabilities, technology tradeoffs, and the vision to recognize the site’s opportunities and limitations.

The last and newest toolbox is the hard-wired CPU on or under the desk or carried in the palm that enables faster, more accurate estimating of materials and task-times, faster, better-looking proposal preparation, job cost tracking, and more. It is also a communications tool by which to receive contacts from potential customers and send information in response.

## An eye on details

While every resource may not be applicable to every job, a true professional knows when and how to selectively use the most appropriate tools. Seldom will a professional be heard saying, “I wish I had a digital whatchamacallit for this one.”

Often, he will have several tools that could do the job and can select the one best suited to each set of job conditions.

Many installers say that the actual installation activities are the most enjoyable part of the job. Working outside with the aroma of freshly turned soil, hydraulic fluid

and PVC solvent in the air, the sliding rattle of aggregate tumbling from the bucket into the excavation, and the feeling of accomplishment when water jets to a common height from each lateral end cleanout just can’t be beat!

Yet even after the site is backfilled and graded and the tender shoots of grass are

poking through the straw mulch, the most critical operational details may still not be completed. The homeowner briefing is an opportunity – indeed, a requirement in some

jurisdictions – for the professional installer to impart essential knowledge on the system’s new owner.

This is where the do’s and don’ts of system operation are explained. A walk-over familiarizes the owners with the locations of the system components, their respective functions, and specific operation and maintenance requirements. The homeowner packet the professional has assembled will include all the information covered in this meeting.

## A valuable resource

A site diagram with distances to each component from two fixed reference points, all manufacturers’ warranties, a copy of the permit, a warranty statement with contact information from the installer, and a simplified service interval recommendation sheet round out this final resource for the customer.

If the installer also offers pumping services, or has a relationship with a professional pumper, a referral card, first pump-out discount coupon, and contact information will also be provided.

The professional installer is indeed a valuable resource that landowners will recognize and value – before, during and after installation. They will tell their friends and new neighbors, and that good will in the community will go much farther than any job done by a one-day wonder. The professional also becomes known in the regulatory community, and his work is appreciated there as well.

## Problem-free

When a system shows signs of problems, a common question is, “Who installed this system?” Often, the answer points to a specific and repeating problem that a particular installer has included with every job. It may be installation during a period of excessive soil moisture; it may be a poorly supported effluent delivery line that has snapped; it may be any number of things.

Some installers become known by the problems they build; some become known for their problem-free installations. It’s not hard to predict which one, in the long run, will prosper in business, and which one will elevate the stature of the industry.

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