

# **A homeowner's guide to having the peat moss replaced in your peat based septic system.**

This guide will help you understand the process of having your peat septic system replaced and enable you to get your peat moss replaced properly at the best possible price. In this guide you will read about the **13 steps of a peat replacement, 4 common rip-offs/shortcuts you should avoid, pricing guide, 3 simple things to extend the life of your peat systems, 7 questions you should ask your contractor, and frequently asked questions.**

## **The 13 steps of a peat replacement (some of these steps are only relevant to Puraflo peat systems)**

- 1) Pump septic tank if house will be occupied during replacement
- 2) Cut out distribution pipes to make removing the old peat easier. (Puraflo peat system only)
- 3) Dig out old peat using shovels, it will be basically like mud at this point. Dig it out and load onto a trailer owned and operated by a properly licensed septage hauler
- 4) Remove old gravel
- 5) Clear drainage holes at bottom of Puraflo pod using screwdriver or other tool. If roots have grown into holes, drill new holes. (Puraflo peat systems only)
- 6) Test drainage with garden hose. Pour water into pods to make sure it drains. This is very important.
- 7) Install new gravel (Puraflo peat systems only)
- 8) Have peat delivered. The Puraflo peat comes in 1000 lb bags from Ireland. Ecoflo peat comes 30 bags to a pallet from Canada. See <http://www.septicdoc.com/peat.html> for pictures of the bags and the process. Ideally, the bags are delivered by fork lift right beside each pod if they are accessible. It is worth the effort to prep the site to allow for bag delivery adjacent to the pods if possible.
- 9) Install peat, pack it in as you go, each Puraflo pod will take 1.25 bags of peat. Ecoflo pods take 30 bags of Ecoflo peat, 15 bags per side of the pod.
- 10) Reinstall distribution system when pods are about 65% full (Puraflo peat system only)
- 11) Finish installing peat, 1 bag under distribution pipes and .25 bag on top of pipe
- 12) Pods probably had 4 inch bolts before the replacement, we install 6 to 8" long bolts to fasten the lids. The lids get warped and become such a pain in the neck to get back in place properly. Having the extra bolt length is hugely helpful to secure the lids and makes it more likely that the system will be maintained properly moving forward
- 13) Submit to the local health department a final inspection report signed by your ORC (operator-in-responsible charge)

## **4 things to avoid when having your peat moss replaced**

- 1) Contractor only partially removes the old peat moss and gravel. This saves the contractor time and money, but it is the quickest way to shorten the life of your newly installed peat moss. Pods that are improperly cleaned, or have old moss left in them will not drain properly and will result in premature failure

- 2) Less new peat added than required. At the completion of the job, the peat pods should be full to the brim with fresh peat. How much peat the system requires varies between Puraflo and Ecoflo systems. 1.25 bags per Puraflo pod and 1 pallet of peat moss per Ecoflo pod.
- 3) Process not appropriately documented. This may not be a rip-off per se, but if you don't have adequate documentation of the process, you may not be able to determine if the job was done properly. Request pictures at each phase of the replacement to ensure the job was done properly.
- 4) Not clearing drain holes in bottom of pod and ensuring that pod drains properly. If some of the holes have become clogged totally or partially with roots or other debris, the new peat may fail prematurely due to waterlogged peat.

Before you get started, make sure you (or whomever you hire have all the information, materials, contractors needed to finish the job in 2 to 3 days if the home is occupied). Have your contractor take lots of pictures of the process showing that it was done properly. If the home is unoccupied it is ok to take longer to complete the work.

#### **Pricing – Pricing will vary based on how far out in advance you plan the work, time of year etc.**

A Puraflo system will cost approximately \$1475 per pod while an Ecoflo system will cost approximately \$3495 per unit. Accessibility to the systems and landscaping (shrub removal) will impact the cost of the job. Get your system done properly for the lowest possible price by starting your peat replacement planning today.

#### **The 3 things minimum your subsurface operator should do to extend the life of your peat system**

- 1) **Rake the peat moss annually.** The manufacturers of peat systems, as well as the local health department, recommend that the peat moss be raked on an annual basis to prevent ponding of wastewater and premature failure of the peat. This requires opening the lids of the peat pods, removing hardware, and raking the peat. It doubles the amount of time an operations visit takes and many operators neglect this step since no one is looking over their shoulder.
- 2) **Measure pump flow rate at each visit and adjust the system timer as necessary.** Peat systems are designed to receive a very specific dose of wastewater 12 times per day. This timed does makes sure the system doesn't get overloaded during times of high water usage. Timers that are improperly calibrated flood systems causing premature peat failure.
- 3) **Perform the water quality sample as early in the summer as allowable by the local health department.** Even under ideal circumstances peat systems on the Outer banks get pushed to their limits by families on vacation. Higher than normal water use and unfamiliarity with what should and shouldn't be poured down the drain really push the systems to the limit. The odds of collecting a water sample with good results in June is much better than a water sample in August or September after months of high demand usage.

#### **7 Questions You Should Ask Your Contractor**

Be sure to have a contract in place with your contractor that clearly outlines expectations.

Ask questions like:

- 1) Will the contractor pay the operator of the system to perform a final inspection if required by health department?
- 2) Will the contractor communicate freely and effectively with the operator concerning the replacement?
- 3) Is any landscaping necessary to site prep i.e. shrub removal included in the contract?
- 4) Who is responsible for checking drawdown rates and ensuring proper system functionality at conclusion of peat replacement?
- 5) What are payment terms, does the contractor accept credit cards?
- 6) Does the contractor provide any support should operational or documentation issues arise?
- 7) Will photographs be taken of every step of the process to ensure compliance?
- 8) Does the contractor perform the work per the manufacturer's guidelines? If they say yes, ask them to provide you with a copy.

## **Other questions we are frequently asked**

### **FAQs**

#### **Why do I need to replace the peat media in my peat based septic system?**

Over time the peat moss that treats the waste water before entering the ground breaks down into mud and does not treat the waste water properly any more. At this point, the peat pods can begin overflowing as they become water logged.

#### **Why do I have a peat system instead of a "regular" septic?**

The short answer is that peat systems allowed for a larger home to be built on the lot. Peat systems take up less space than most conventional septic systems. In some cases, peat systems were installed due to speed of installation and lucrative engineering fees and the system may be able to be converted to a low-pressure pipe system.

#### **When will you need to replace the peat media?**

This answer will vary, but in our experience every 8 to 12 years depending on many variables.

#### **How will I know I need to replace the peat in my septic system?**

The subsurface operator who conducts inspections and takes samples of the peat system should notify you in advance. The local environmental health department will mail you a notice stating that they will require the peat media to be replaced by a certain date in the future.

#### **What happens if I don't do it or pass my deadline?**

If you miss your deadline but are making efforts to get the work completed, the local health department will most likely work with you and cut you some slack. If you flat out refuse to do it they will threaten to take legal action against your property to have the occupancy certification revoked and water turned off until the work is complete.

#### **Can the home be occupied while the work is done?**

Yes, but ideally it isn't. The septic tank serving the home can be pumped as needed to allow for the peat replacement to be completed while the home is occupied. Depending on the location of the septic tanks, peat pods, and driveway configuration, the peat replacement may or may not cause significant disruption residents and guests staying in the house.

#### **Do I have to sample my peat system every summer?**

Yes, North Carolina State law says you do to ensure that the system is compliant with the issued operations permit.

**You can see pictures of peat replacements at <http://www.septicdoc.com/peat.html>**

This information is provided as a courtesy by Septic Doc, [www.septicdoc.com](http://www.septicdoc.com), 252-564-7897. Septic Doc helps home and business owners properly maintain septic systems in order to enhance their property value, mitigate costs due to system failure, and prevent rental and/or operations income interruptions due to failing septic system.

If you'd like to receive a quote for peat replacement specifically tailored to your peat system contact us at [obxsepticdoc@gmail.com](mailto:obxsepticdoc@gmail.com) or 252-564-7897.