



News Release

Monongahela National Forest

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Safe Disposal of Wastewater at Forest Service Campsites

(Elkins, WV) With the advent of spring, many people are thinking of taking camping trips, with a tent, motor home or pull-behind camper. The Monongahela National Forest offers a wide range of options for people looking for an enjoyable camping experience in some of the most beautiful locations in West Virginia. Those seeking solitude can find it in a variety of remote locations within the Forest, while those who prefer some level of amenity and who enjoy the company of others will find numerous designated campsites and campgrounds.

No matter where people camp they are asked to observe basic “leave no trace” methods to minimize their impact on the natural environment. These include the “pack it in, pack it out” concept of taking all materials possible back home for those camping in the back country, and the use of designated refuse sites for those camping in developed areas. One critical thing people can do to minimize their impact on the environment is to properly dispose of both human waste and so called “gray water” from cooking and cleaning. Most people understand the concerns with proper disposal of human waste, but some are unaware of the problems that can occur with careless disposal of gray water.

Used dishwashing water contains particles of food, which can create both a nuisance odor and attract flies and therefore disease. Soaps, even those designed specifically for camping, can have a negative effect on plants, soils, groundwater, and streams. People camping in the Monongahela can do their best to protect natural resources and reduce health and nuisance hazards through a variety of means, depending upon where they are camping.

When camping in remote areas without toilet facilities, people should move away from streams, and dig small holes to serve as toilets and then cover them well. Gray water should be dispersed on the ground in a wide area, away from streams, and away from the campsite area.

Developed campgrounds within the Monongahela all contain suitable toilet facilities for the day to day disposal of human waste. If motor homes or camping trailers with holding tanks for human waste (black water) and gray water are being used, campers must empty the tanks in approved locations capable of handling the large volumes being stored. Some Forest Service

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camp grounds have specific facilities into which these holding tanks may be appropriately discharged; if so they may be used. Prior to using campgrounds in the Monongahela, visitors can call the local Forest Service office to learn if the campground has proper receptacles for gray and/or black water or to learn where the nearest dump station is located.

Toilet buildings are not suitable locations for emptying motor home or camping trailer gray or black water due to the large volume of material holding tanks can contain. If there is no specifically identified facility in a campground for emptying holding tanks campers must keep the material in the tanks until they can locate an appropriate dump station. It is illegal to dump these materials on Forest Service lands at any location other than in a specifically identified dump facility, and tickets will be issued to violators.

Tent campers without holding tanks should observe environmental precautions for the proper disposal of gray water from washing and cooking. It is recommended that they dispose of the water in toilet buildings (which can accommodate a small volume from individual campers) or take the water to areas beyond the developed campground, and disperse over the ground, away from streams.

“It may seem a small thing for an individual to empty their camper holding tank into a toilet, but our facilities are simply not built to accommodate large volumes of water from holding tanks” notes Monongahela recreation manager Eric Sandeno. “ We’re looking into ways we can add suitable dump facilities at developed sites which do not currently offer this service, but in the meantime we need to emphasize it is illegal to dump holding tanks into toilets, just as it is illegal to dump them onto the ground or into a stream.” Sandeno emphasizes that most people camping in the Forest care about the health of the forest surroundings they’re in, and that by observing basic leave no-trace practices it is possible to have an enjoyable camping experience while safeguarding natural resources and discouraging the spread of disease.

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