

SEPTIC SYSTEM

Homeowners Guide and Recordkeeping Folder

DID YOU KNOW...

... that a properly designed and installed septic system can be the safest, most economical way to treat your wastewater as long as it is properly maintained? If you are like most homeowners, you probably never give much thought to what happens to what goes down your drain. But if you own a car and understand how important it is to do preventative maintenance (like changing your oil), then you can understand how maintaining your septic system can save you money and headaches "down the road." This owner's guide can help you be sure that your septic system is used and maintained properly. This folder also provides a place to record and keep important information, such as your permit, a sketch of your system, maintenance records, and other fact sheets. Read and use this folder to learn:



How a septic system works



Why and how to maintain your septic system



How to keep your own maintenance record



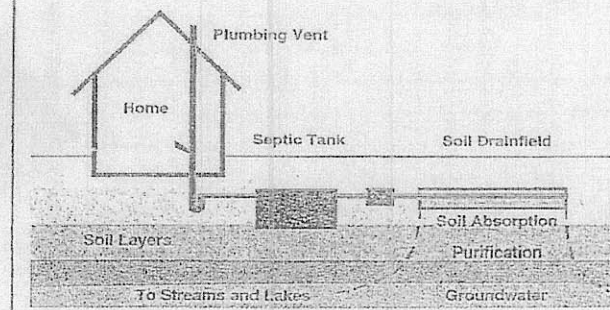
HOW DO SEPTIC SYSTEMS WORK?

System Description. A septic tank system uses natural processes to treat and dispose of the wastewater generated in your home. It typically consists of a septic tank and a drainfield, or soil absorption field. The septic tank provides the first step in treatment. As wastewater flows into the tank, the heavier solids settle to the bottom to form a sludge layer, and the lighter solids, greases, and oils float to the top to form a scum layer. The liquid wastewater (effluent) from the tank flows into gravel-filled trenches in a typical drainfield where it is distributed via perforated pipes and then treated by the natural soil system. The diagram below shows the components of a typical septic system.

System Operation. The septic tank provides some biological treatment of the sludge and scum layers that accumulate there. The majority of treatment occurs in the drainfield where the effluent enters the soil and is treated as it percolates to the groundwater. The soil acts as a biological and physical filter to remove harmful substances, including disease-causing bacteria and viruses, toxic organics and other undesirable wastewater constituents remaining in the effluent.

Outlet filters or baffles are located in the tank and are designed to prevent the sludge and scum from flowing into the drainfield. If the tank is not pumped regularly to remove the accumulated solids, the tank will fill with sludge and the solids will be washed out into the drainfield, or clog the outlet filter. If solids reach the drainfield or clog the outlet filter, they will quickly clog the soil and eventually lead to system failure.

Basic Septic System Components



TAKING CARE OF YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION IS WORTH A TON OF CURE! Committing a little attention to the care of your system can help to avoid the nightmare of a failing system. Assuming that your septic system was properly located, designed, and installed according to state codes, you are now in the driver's seat for the care of your system. By following the recommendations below, you can help your system to work properly for years to come.

DO's:

- Conserve water to reduce the amount of wastewater that must be treated and disposed of by your system. Doing laundry over several days will put less stress on your system.
- Repair any leaking faucets or toilets. To detect toilet leaks, add several drops of food dye to the toilet tank and see if dye ends up in the bowl.
- Divert down spouts and other surface water away from your tank & drainfield. Excessive water keeps the soil from adequately cleansing the wastewater.
- Have your septic tank inspected and pumped regularly by a licensed septic tank contractor.* Suggested frequency is 3-5 years.
- Keep your septic tank cover accessible for inspections and pumpings. Install risers with lids if necessary.
- Call your county health department or a registered septic tank contractor whenever you experience problems with your system, or if there are any signs of system failure.
- Keep a detailed record of repairs, pumpings, inspections, and other maintenance activities. Pass these on to the next homeowner.

** Pumping your septic tank is probably the single most important thing you can do to protect your system. If the buildup of solids in the tank becomes too high and solids move to the drainfield, this could clog and strain the system to the point where a new drainfield will be needed.*

DON'Ts:

- Don't drive over your tank & drainfield or compact the soil in any way.
- Don't dig around the tank or drainfield, or build anything over it, and don't cover it with a hard surface such as concrete or asphalt.
- Don't plant anything over or near the drainfield except grass. Roots from nearby trees and shrubs may clog and damage the drain lines.
- Don't use a garbage disposal, or at least limit its usage. Disposals increase solids loadings to your tank by about 50%, so you have to pump your tank more often than normally suggested.
- Don't use your toilet as a trash can or poison your system and the groundwater by pouring harmful chemicals and cleansers down the drain. Harsh chemicals can kill the bacteria that help purify your wastewater. See the list below for examples.
- Don't put in a separate pipe to carry wash waters to a side ditch or the woods. This graywater contains germs that can spread disease. Use a laundry system.
- Don't waste money on septic tank additives. The bacteria needed to treat wastewater is naturally present in sewage. Additives can resuspend solids causing your drainfield to clog. Additives do not eliminate the need for routine pumping of your tank.
- Don't allow backwash from home water softeners to enter the septic system.
- Never enter a septic tank -- toxic gases from the tank can kill. If your system develops problems, get advice from your county health department or a licensed septic tank contractor.



DO NOT FLUSH

coffee grinds	dental floss
disposable diapers	kitty litter
sanitary napkins	tampons
cigarette butts	condoms
fats, grease or oil	paper towels
paints	varishes
thinners	waste oils
photographic solutions	pesticides
antibiotics	