

Caring for your Septic System

The accumulated scum on the top and solids in the bottom of the septic tank should be pumped out every three to five years to prolong the life of your system. Septic systems must be maintained regularly to stay working.

Neglect or abuse of your septic system can cause it to fail. Failing septic systems can:

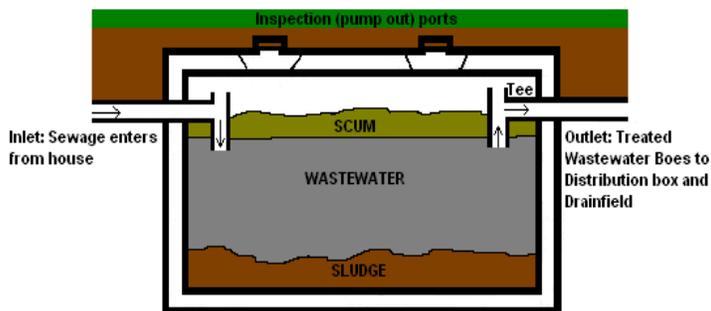
- cause a serious health threat to your family and neighbors,
- degrade the environment, especially lakes, streams and groundwater,
- reduce the value of your property
- be very expensive to repair,
- and, put thousands of water supply users at risk if you live in a public water supply watershed and fail to maintain your system.

Be alert to these warning signs of a failing system:

- sewage surfacing over the drainfield (especially after storms)
- sewage back-ups in the house
- lush, green growth over the drainfield,
- slow draining toilets or drains,
- sewage odors.

While typically designed to hold 1250 gallons of liquid, the size of the tank varies by the number of bedrooms in the home. The purpose of the holding or septic tank is to separate the solids from the liquids.

The solids, in the form of sludge, which collects on the bottom of the tank, and scum, which floats on the top of the water, remain in the tank and are pumped out periodically. The wastewater is passed on to the septic field.



Annually inspect the condition of septic tank parts (access lids, baffles, liquid level and thickness of scum layer). Contact your local Health Department for information.

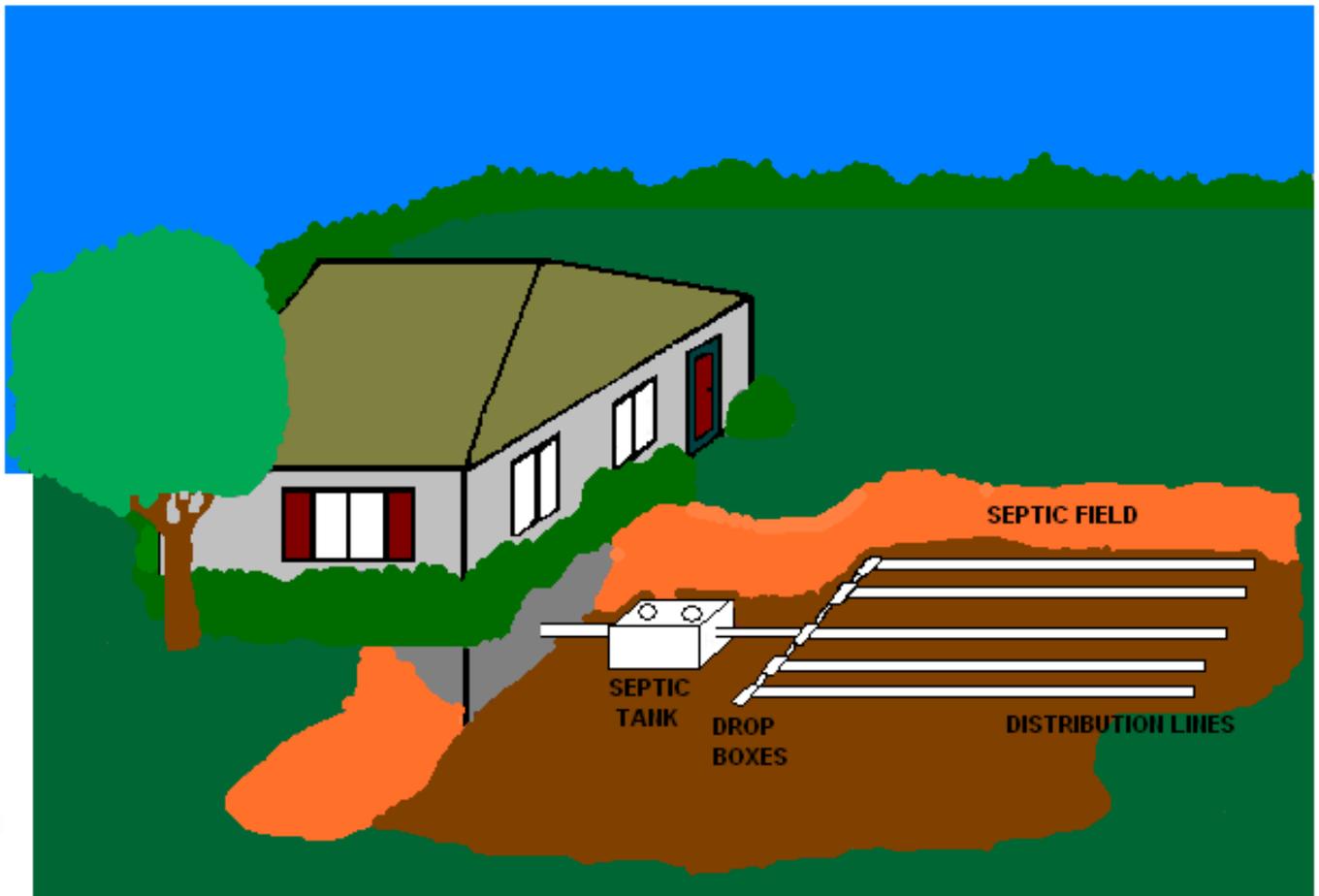
Tips to Avoid Trouble

- **DO** have your tank pumped out and system inspected every 3 to 5 years by a licensed septic pumper (listed in the yellow pages).
- **DO** keep a record of pumping, inspections and other maintenance. Use the back page of this brochure to record maintenance dates.
- **DO** practice water conservation. Repair dripping faucets and leaking toilets, run washing machines and dishwashers only when full, avoid long showers, and use water-saving features in faucets, showerheads and toilets.
- **DO** learn the location of your septic system and drainfield. Keep a sketch of it handy for service visits.
- **DO** divert roof drains and surface water from driveways and hillsides away from the septic system. Keep sump pumps and house footing drains away from the septic system as well.
- **DO** take leftover hazardous household chemicals to your approved hazardous waste collection center for disposal. Use bleach, disinfectants, and drain and toilet bowl cleaners sparingly and in accordance with product labels.
- **DON'T** allow anyone to drive or park over any part of the system. The area over the drainfield should be left undisturbed with only a mowed grass cover. Roots from nearby trees or shrubs may clog and damage your drain lines.
- **DON'T** make or allow repairs to your septic system without obtaining the required health department permit. Always use professional licensed septic contractors.
- **DON'T** build over the septic field, including decks, driveways, and above ground swimming pools.
- **DON'T** install garbage disposals. They cause premature system failures and require yearly pumping of your septic tank.
- **DON'T** use commercial septic tank additives. These products usually do not help and some may hurt your system in the long run.
- **DON'T** use your toilet as a trash can by dumping nondegradables (such as grease, sanitary napkins, disposable diapers, paper towels, condoms, plastics, cigarettes, etc.) down your toilets or drains. Also, don't poison your septic system and the ground water by pouring harmful chemicals (such as paint thinners, oils, solvents) down the drain. Limit the excess use of household cleaners, personal care products, cleansers, and drain cleaners.

Septic Systems Explained

Septic systems are private sewage disposal systems that use the soil to treat small wastewater flow, usually from individual homes. They are typically used in rural or large lot settings where centralized wastewater treatment is impractical.

There are many types of septic systems in use today. While all septic systems are individually designed for each site, most septic systems are based on the same principles.



A **septic system** consists of a **septic tank**, **drop boxes** and a **drainfield**, all connected by pipes called **header lines**.

Your septic system treats your household wastewater by temporarily holding it in the septic tank where heavy solids and lighter scum are allowed to separate from the wastewater. This separation process is known as **primary treatment**. The solids stored in the tank are decomposed by bacteria and later removed, along with the lighter scum, by a professional septic tank pumper.

After the partially treated wastewater leaves the tank, it flows into **drop boxes**, which separate the flow evenly into a network of **distribution lines**. Drainage holes in each line allow the wastewater to drain into gravel trenches for temporary storage. This **effluent** then slowly seeps into the subsurface soil where it is further treated and purified (**secondary treatment**). A properly functioning septic system does not pollute the groundwater.