

Caring for Your Septic System

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The accumulated solids in the bottom of the septic tanks 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.

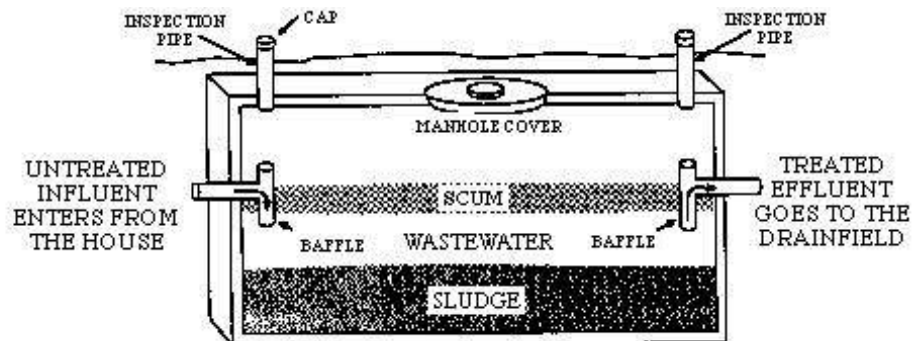
Be alert to these warning signs of a failing system:

- 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.

If there is a filter in the outlet tee of the septic tank it should be accessible and checked annually.

The septic tank provides primary treatment. All systems must have secondary treatment such as a sand filter.

Septic Tank Diagram



Caring for your Septic System – Do's and Don'ts

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DON'T

Add so-called “chemical cleaning agents” for system maintenance.

There are no known chemicals, yeast, bacteria, enzymes, or other substances with the capacity of eliminating or reducing the sludge or scum so that periodic cleaning is unnecessary. Many of these cleaners contain highly concentrated organic solvents that are rated toxic and are suspected to be cancer causing agents by the Environmental Protection Agency and National Cancer Institute. They may not be biodegradable and may pose a threat to private and public water supplies. The use of such products is not necessary for the proper functioning of the septic system.

Allow heavy vehicles on the leaching area.

The weight of vehicles could lead to crushed pipes and the eventual failure of the system.

Plant deep rooted trees and/or wetland vegetation over the leaching area.

The presence of deep-rooted or wetland type vegetation over the leaching area may lead to the clogging of the leaching pipes since this type of vegetation seeks out groundwater. Some of the vegetation in question would be willow trees, red maples, highbush blueberry, etc.....It would be helpful to consult with a landscape architect prior to proceeding with any plantings in the area of the leach field.

Locate garden sheds, paved driveways, garages, etc. over your septic tanks or leaching fields.

DO

Have your septic tank inspected and/or pumped out every 3 to 5 years.

Solids could overflow to the leaching facility causing damage that would require expensive repairs. Your local Board of Health will have a list of approved septic tank cleaning contractors in your area.

Investigate signs of failure immediately.

- Slow draining of toilets and sinks.
- Foul odors, patches of green grass, ponded water, or melting snow near the leaching system, and depressions in the ground surface around the leaching area are all signs of possible problems with your system.

Minimize water use.

The less water used, the longer the retention period in the tank and the more solids the bacteria can decompose.

Avoid the disposal of the following wastes to a subsurface system:

- The disposal of garbage to the system can affect the ability of the system to decompose the solids.
- Sanitary napkins, colored toilet paper, disposable diapers, tissues, paper towels and cigarettes can be difficult to break down.
- Cooking oil, grease, fat, or other types of floatables (such as lubricants, motor and machine oils, and other petroleum based products) may bypass the baffles and clog the leaching field.
- Pesticides, concentrated disinfectants, acids, medicines, paint thinners and petroleum based products will kill the helpful bacteria in the tank and will contaminate the ground water and possibly infiltrate to a water supply.