

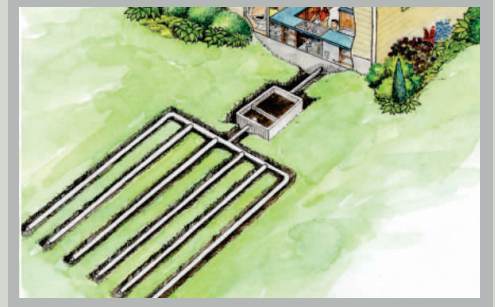
A GUIDE TO SEPTICS

Understanding Your Home's Wastewater System

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How do septic systems work?

Septic systems provide onsite wastewater treatment. They are your home or cottage's sewage treatment facility. Hidden from view, this "facility" is hard at work collecting all your wastewater through your plumbing, treating it and returning it back to the soil.



Septic system maintenance

A licensed sewage hauler or onsite sewage system professional should remove the septic tank cover and inspect the system every three to five years and pump out the solids and scum when required.

Did you know that septic systems are the responsibility of the homeowner? It is up to you to keep your system working properly to protect your environment, your health, and your investment. When properly designed, constructed, and maintained, a septic system should provide long-term, effective treatment of your household wastewater. If you take good care of your system, you will save time, money and worries involved in replacing a failed system. The following are some valuable tips to ensure the longevity of your system.

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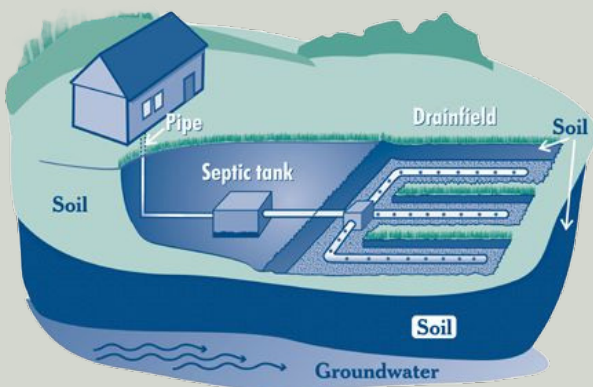
What happens when there's a problem?

Septic systems have a lifespan of approximately 15 to 40 years. A malfunctioning system is easy to see... and smell. If you suspect you have a problem with your septic system, it is important to fix the problem quickly. A malfunctioning septic system is a risk to the local environment and your health. It can quickly contaminate groundwater and surfaces used as drinking water sources.

Symptoms of a malfunctioning septic system:

- household drains slow down
- toilets back up
- sewage smell in yard
- grass over septic system is unusually green and/or spongy
- bacteria or nitrate contamination shows up in well water
- surface ponding of effluent

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A failed distribution system can leak contamination into local ditches, streams, and watercourses. Wastewater contains high levels of phosphorous. Excess phosphorous causes excessive algae and weed growth in surface water.

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Be Septic Smart

Do

- familiarize yourself with the location of your system
- always keep the tank access lid secured to the riser
- keep an as-built system diagram in a safe place for reference
- keep accurate records of septic system maintenance and service calls
- test your well water at least three times a year (spring, summer and fall) for indicator bacteria
- have your tank inspected for sludge and scum buildup on a regular basis (3-5 years) and clean out when a third of the depth of your tank is full of sludge and scum
- have your effluent filter checked and cleaned every year; if you don't have an effluent filter, consider adding one
- divert surface water away from your distribution system
- conserve water in the house to reduce the amount of wastewater that must be treated
- repair leaky plumbing fixtures
- replace inefficient toilets with low-flush models
- consider installing a lint filter on your washing machine's discharge pipe

Don't

- enter a tank-gases and lack of oxygen can be fatal
- put cooking oil or food waste down the drain
- flush hazardous chemicals, pharmaceuticals, cigarette butts or sanitary products
- use a garbage disposal unit/garburator unless your system has been designed for it
- use special additives that are claimed to enhance the performance of your tank or system- you don't need them!
- dig without knowing the location of your distribution system
- drive or park over your tank or distribution system
- pave over your distribution system
- allow livestock on the distribution system
- plant trees or shrubs too close to the septic tank or distribution system
- connect rain gutters, storm drains, sump pumps or allow surface water to drain into a septic system
- connect a distribution system or greywater system to agricultural field drainage
- discharge water softener backwash to the septic system unless your system has been designed for it
- drain hot tub and spa water to the septic system

Setback Requirements

The tables below list the required clearance distances for components of sewage systems. The clearance distances are listed in meters (m). If the leaching bed is raised, add 2 meters for every 1 meter rise.

	Wells with 6m casing	Wells without 6m casing	Potable Springs	Non-potable springs	Surface water (lakes, rivers, etc.)	Property lines	Structures
Class 2 Leaching Pit	10m	30m	30m	15m	15m	3m	1.5m
Class 4 Distribution Pipe C= Conventional leaching bed R=Raised leaching bed	C=15m R=18m	C=30m R=33m	C=15m R=18m	C=15m R=18m	C=15m R=18m	C=3m R=6m	C=5m R=8m
Class 4 Septic Tank	15m	15m	15m	15m	15m	3m	1.5m
Class 5 Holding Tank	15m	15m	15m	15m	15m	3m	1.5m

Your Impact

A properly functioning septic system is part of a healthy water cycle. Septic systems return used water (effluent) to the soil, recharging groundwater supplies. A poorly functioning septic system can impact the quality of your drinking water.

Resources

<https://www.algomapublichealth.com/environment-inspections/sewage-system-building-permits/>
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/septic-systems>