

# Private Septic Systems

Living beyond the reach of a community sewer has the advantage of no monthly bill, but septic system owners are not off the hook. If properly designed, constructed and maintained, your septic system can provide long term, effective treatment of household wastewater.

The typical household septic system has four main components; a pipe from the home to the septic tank, a septic tank which leads to a drainfield and the soil. Microbes in the tank and the soil digest or remove most contaminants from the wastewater before it reaches groundwater.

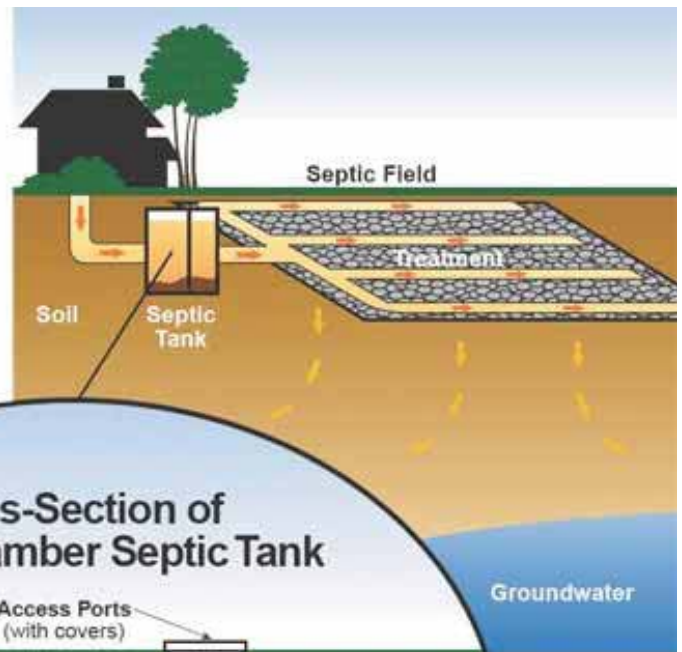
After the wastewater leaves the house, the first stop is in the septic tank where the solids sink to the bottom and the floatables float to the top. The septic tank provides primary treatment and serves to protect the drainfield by removing toilet paper, large solids, foreign objects and grease that could otherwise move to the drainfield and cause clogging.

The partially clarified wastewater, now called effluent, leaves the septic tank and travels to the drainfield where it is spread over a large area below the surface to infiltrate into the ground.

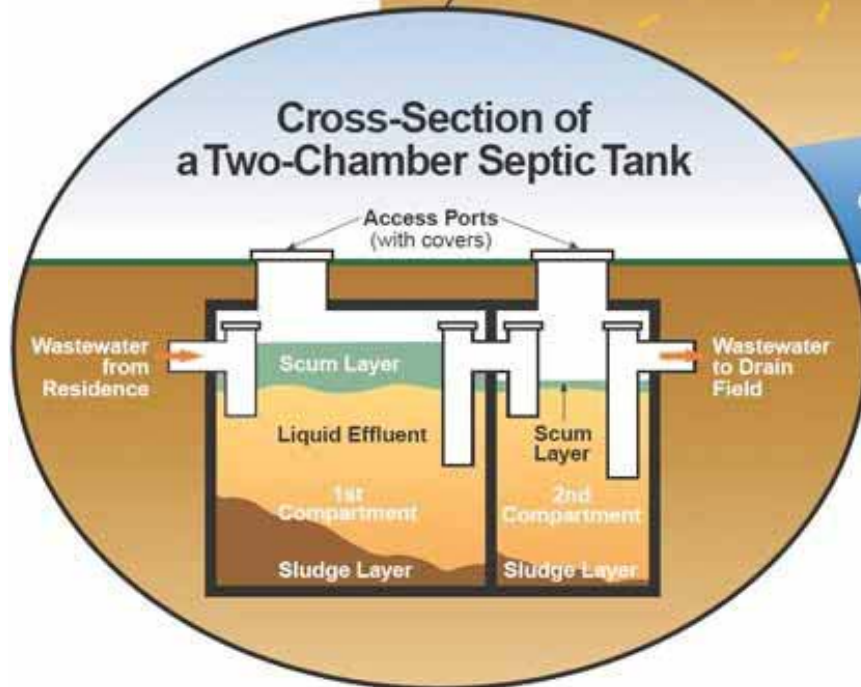
There are a number of things septic system owners can do to help their systems function properly and prolong life. Septic maintenance is inexpensive compared to the cost of replacing the drainfield.

## Maintenance Tips for the Septic System

- The septic tank should be pumped approximately every 3 to 5 years, depending on the tank size and the number of people in the house.
- Your tank probably has an effluent filter if the home or septic system was built after 2001. This filter should be rinsed off each year. Contact the county environmental health department to find out how to perform this or you can contact a septic tank pumper to have the service provided by a licensed professional.



*This diagram shows the parts of a septic tank and septic system*



## *Maintenance Tips for Outside the House*

- Deep-rooted vegetation can cause problems with drainfield lines.
- Irrigation and runoff from roofs should be diverted away from the drainfield.
- Never drive over the drainfield or septic tank. Compaction, increased settling, can compromise the system.

## *Tips for Inside the House*

- Keep good records of the system layout and maintenance.
- Avoid running excessive amounts of water to the system at the same time; spread laundry out over the week.
- Ensure that your water softener is a demand re-generation type. Replace units that re-charge based on a timer. Do not discharge backflush/backwash water from a water softener system into your sewer line.

## *Things to avoid putting down the drain are:*

- Prescription or non-prescription drugs
- Paint
- Wet wipes
- Grease
- Garbage disposal waste
- Coffee grounds
- Feminine products
- Paper towels
- Excessive household cleaners
- Powdered laundry, dish detergents, bleach

A compromised system can contaminate ground water and/or wastewater can back up into the home; sometimes it will rise to the surface and pool, causing health hazards and expensive repairs. Other reasons for septic system failure is a system which is too small for the home or the absorptive capacity of the soils the drainfield is constructed in is not adequate.

Contact the county environmental health department at (406) 283-2442 for current septic requirements or information. Other resources include the EPA, [www.epa.gov/owm/septic](http://www.epa.gov/owm/septic) and the National Small Flows Clearinghouse at [www.nesc.wvu.edu](http://www.nesc.wvu.edu).



*Ross Creek Cedar Grove*