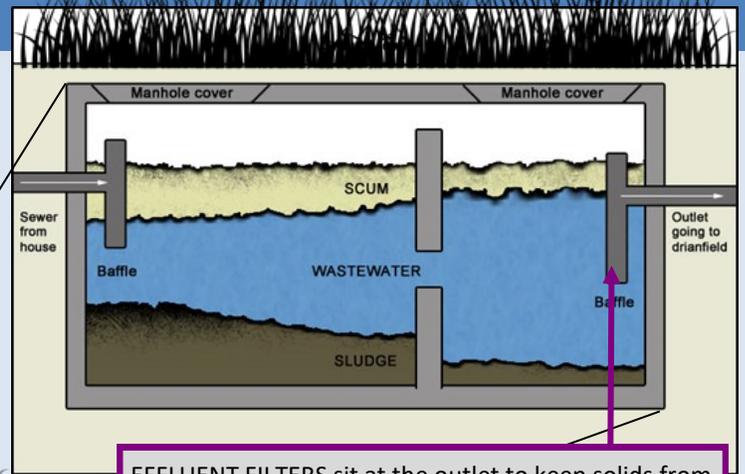


Managing Household Septic

1

How Septic Works

A SEPTIC TANK is a buried, watertight container usually made of concrete, fiberglass or polyethylene. It holds the wastewater flushed from your house and allows solids to settle to the bottom (SLUDGE) and oils and grease to float to the top (SCUM).



EFFLUENT FILTERS sit at the outlet to keep solids from leaving the tank and clogging the LEACH FIELD.

SEPTIC TANK

Many systems include a DISTRIBUTION BOX that splits the flows from the septic tank into multiple leach lines. If a LEACH FIELD is uphill from the SEPTIC TANK, a home may also have a PUMP system (not pictured).

SOIL
GROUNDWATER

Wastewater that leaves the SEPTIC TANK is pushed to a LEACH FIELD where it leaks slowly through perforated pipes and is cleaned by the natural microbes found in your soil. Clean water then trickles back into the groundwater.



Don't Strain Your Drain

- ⇒ Only human waste and toilet paper should be flushed. Never flush feminine hygiene products, diapers, floss, cigarette butts, coffee grounds, cat litter, household chemicals, or pharmaceuticals.
- ⇒ Keep harsh chemicals and greases away from drains. This includes cooking oils, paints, thinners, poisons, solvents, or large volumes of household cleaners. Oxidized bleaches, borax, vinegar, and baking soda are less hazardous alternatives to common household cleaning products.
- ⇒ Equip drains with strainers or other filtration devices. Avoid chemical drain openers for clogged drains. Instead use boiling water or a drain snake. Limit your use of garbage disposals or don't use them at all.
- ⇒ Reduce wastewater with water efficient toilets and other appliances, and install faucet aerators. Stagger laundry loads across the week.

Septic Care

2

- ⇒ Keep a healthy grass cover over the leach field to prevent exposure of the soil and possible erosion.
- ⇒ Don't let woody vegetation grow and keep tree roots at a safe distance. Don't dig into the leach field, reshape the surface soil or plant gardens.
- ⇒ Don't park on or drive over the leach field with heavy vehicles, mowers or portable pools which will compact the soil.
- ⇒ Channel rain water, roof gutters, and sump pump outlets away from the field.



Shield Your Field

Tend the Tank



Pump

SLUDGE and SCUM build up is natural but since only clear wastewater should be transferred to the LEACH FIELD it is necessary to periodically pump out sludge and scum buildup from the SEPTIC TANK.

If you aren't monitoring build-up, tanks should be pumped every 2 to 3 years, depending on the size of the tank, daily flow of wastewater, homeowner maintenance practices, and use of a garbage disposal. A septic plumbing contractor should be hired to pump out and inspect the tank.

Inspect

All parts of the system should be inspected annually. Septic professionals can check and adjust your DISTRIBUTION BOX to maintain equal distribution in the leach field. They can also check your PUMP for solids build-up and control panel/alarm operation.

SLUDGE and SCUM build up should be monitored regularly. Septic tanks need to be pumped out when the SLUDGE layer exceeds 24 inches in thickness or when the top of the layer is within 12 inches of the outlet pipe. It also needs to be pumped when the bottom of the SCUM layer is less than 6 inches above the outlet pipe. Inspectors will provide you with these levels, keep a record to know when you need to pump.

Clean

EFFLUENT FILTERS should be checked and cleaned 2-3 times per year. You can hire someone to do this work or follow guidelines available here: http://www.gcph.info/files/resources/How_To_Clean_your_Septic_Tank_Filter.pdf

If you choose to do this, remember that the liquid and solid contents of the septic system are capable of causing infectious diseases. After working on any part of the septic system, always wash hands thoroughly before eating, drinking, or smoking. Change clothes before coming into contact with food or other people. **BE CAREFUL! Never lean into or enter a septic tank. You could be poisoned or asphyxiated. Never use matches or flames when inspecting a septic tank. The gases generated in a septic tank are explosive and deadly.**

3

Signs of Failure

An entire septic system, if well maintained, can last 20—30 years before needing to be replaced. Signs that you might need to replace it sooner include:

- ⇒ Wastewater backing up into household drains.
- ⇒ Bright green, spongy grass on the leach field, even during dry weather.
- ⇒ Pooling water or muddy soil around your septic system or in your basement.
- ⇒ A strong odor around the septic tank and leach field.

Ignoring these signs of failure, or avoiding replacement of an old system can contaminate the environment and present health risks to your family.



4

Costs to Expect

Inspection Services: \$100-200

Pumping Services: \$200-400

Repair: \$50-1,000 depending on the issue

Replacement Tank: \$1,000-1,500

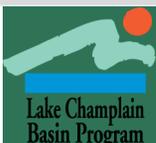
Replacement Pump: \$800-1,200

New leach field: \$5,000-20,000



Factsheet developed from resources provided here:

- epa.gov/septic
- septic.vt.gov



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