

Marshall County Health Department

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Homeowner's Guide to SEPTIC SYSTEMS

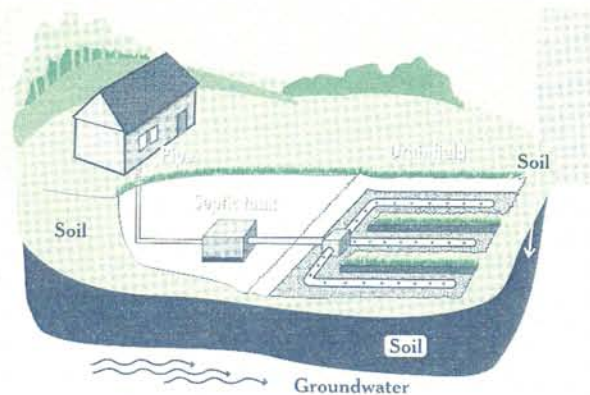
You are the owner and operator of a waste water disposal system and responsible for its care and maintenance

A key reason to maintain your septic system is to save money! Failing septic systems are expensive to repair or replace, and poor maintenance is often the culprit. If you sell your home, your septic system must be in good working order

Septic Tank Start-Up

Late spring or summer is generally considered the best time to begin operation. To start, simply begin using the tank. It is not necessary to fill the tank with water before use, although hot water should be added to the system initially as often as possible (particularly if starting up in winter).

As the solids begin to accumulate in the tank, the natural bacterial digestion process will begin.

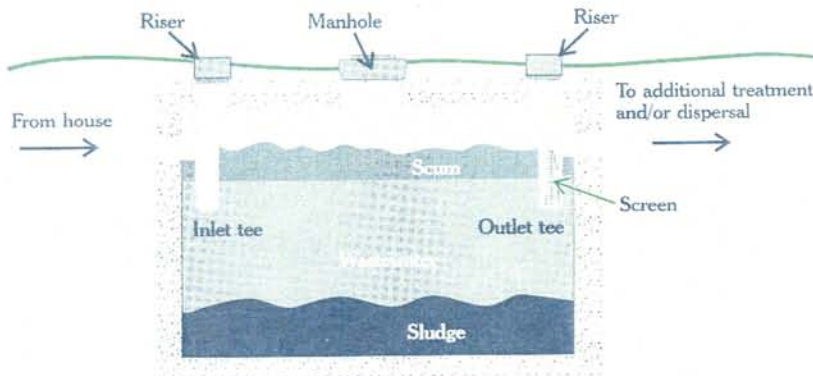


Typical onsite wastewater treatment system

Septic Tank Clean-Out

Even the best designed and operated septic system eventually fails unless the sludge and floating scum are periodically pumped from the tank. If not removed, solids will overflow into and clog the soil absorption field.

Typical single-compartment septic tank with ground-level inspection risers and screen



Garbage Disposals are not recommended due to excess solids added to a septic tank

Generally septic tanks should be cleaned out *at least* every 3-5 years, depending on the size of the tank

Commercial septic tank additives will *not* eliminate the need for periodic clean-out. Additives are not recommended and some can actually damage the system

Out of site out of mind? The State Department of Health estimates that 300,000 homes are not on a sewer system. One could very conservatively estimate 200 gallon per day of wastewater per house or 600 million gallons per day of wastewater put into the Indiana environment.

The soil is the system; it accepts and treats the wastewater. A majority of Indiana's soils have limitations for a conventional septic system and a modified septic is needed in those soils to adequately accept and treat the wastewater.

How do I maintain my septic system?

Pump frequently

You should have your septic system inspected at least every 3 years by a professional and your tank pumped as necessary (generally every 3 to 5 years).

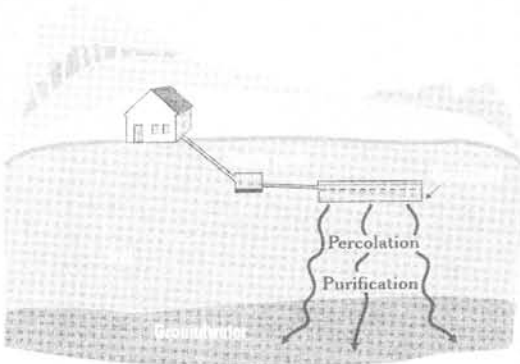
Use water efficiently

Average indoor water use in the typical single-family home is almost 70 gallons per person per day. Dripping faucets can waste about 2,000 gallons of water each year. Leaky toilets can waste as much as 200 gallons each day. The more water a household conserves, the less water enters the septic system.

- Spread washing out over the week so as not to flood the system and stir up solids in the tank
- Fill the bathtub with only as much water as you need
- Turn off faucets while shaving or brushing your teeth
- Run the dishwasher and clothes washer only when they're full
- Use toilets to flush sanitary waste only (not kitty litter, diapers, or other trash)
- Make sure all faucets are completely turned off when not in use
- Maintain your plumbing to eliminate leaks
- Install aerators in the faucets in your kitchen and bathroom
- Replace old dishwashers, toilets, and clothes washers with new, high-efficiency models

Flush responsibly

Dental floss, feminine hygiene products, condoms, diapers, cotton swabs, cigarette butts, coffee grounds, cat litter, paper towels, and other kitchen and bathroom items can clog and potentially damage septic system components.



Flushing household chemicals, gasoline, oil, pesticides, antifreeze, and paint can stress or destroy the biological treatment taking place in the system or might contaminate surface waters and groundwater. Household cleaners and detergents in normal usage should not interfere with the operation of a septic system.

There is more to a septic than the drains working.

A malfunctioning system can contaminate groundwater that might be a source of drinking water.

How to treat your drain field

- Plant only grass over and near your septic system.
- Roots from nearby trees or shrubs might clog and damage the drainfield.
- Don't drive or park vehicles on any part of your septic system. Doing so can compact the soil in your drainfield or damage the pipes, tank, or other septic system components.
- **Keep roof drains, basement sump pump drains, and other rainwater or surface water drainage systems away from the drainfield.** Flooding the drainfield with excessive water slows down or stops treatment processes and can cause plumbing fixtures to back up.
- Do not allow rain water to puddle on top of the drainfield

For More information

Purdue University

<http://persephone.agcom.purdue.edu/AgCom/Pubs/ID/ID-142.html>

EPA

<http://cfpub.epa.gov/own/septic/home.cfm>

Both of the above were used as sources for this sheet 10-04