

# Septic System Components

In areas where public sewer is not available, homeowners must install sewage systems (also known as septic systems) on their property that will treat wastewater coming from the home. These are the main components of a conventional septic system:

## Pipe from House

All of your household wastewater exits your home through a pipe that flows into the septic tank.

## Septic Tank

The septic tank is a buried, watertight container that holds wastewater long enough for solids to settle to the bottom (sludge) and oil and grease to float to the top (scum). It also allows solid materials to begin to decompose. Multiple compartments and a baffle or outlet tee in the septic tank prevent the sludge and scum from leaving the tank and entering the drainfield. Some sewage systems may have more than one septic tank, depending on the size of the home.

## Drainfield

Every time new wastewater enters the septic tank, the same amount of wastewater (or effluent) exits the tank and is pushed into the drainfield. If the drainfield is overloaded with too much liquid, it will flood. This prevents treatment of wastewater, and may cause sewage to flow to the surface of the ground or back up into the house. A reserve drainfield is an area on your property suitable for a new drainfield system if your current one fails.

## Soil

Septic tank wastewater flows to the drainfield, where it filters down into the soil. Natural processes in the soil remove most of the bacteria in the wastewater before it eventually reaches groundwater. Soil that allows for percolation, or drainage, is necessary for successful wastewater treatment.

If properly used and maintained, your onsite septic system should give you many years of trouble-free service.

Keep in mind that your septic system is not the same as a municipal sewer. It has a limited life expectancy, which can be drastically shortened by improper care!

Please contact our office for specific questions about your septic system.



**Washtenaw County  
Department of Public Health  
Environmental Health Division**

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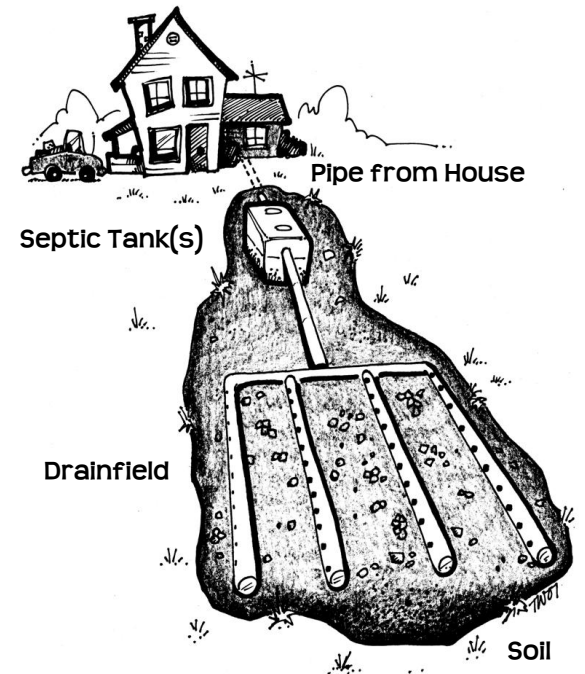
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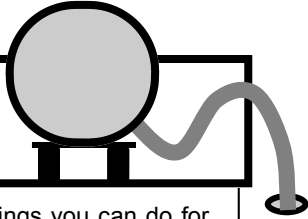
# Maintaining Your Septic System



**Washtenaw County,  
Michigan**

# 4 Ways to Help Your Septic System:

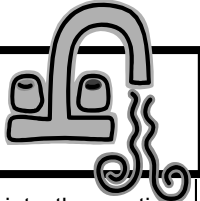
## 1 Pump Your Septic Tank



One of the most important things you can do for your system is to have the septic tank pumped regularly. If you forget to pump, solids could flow into the drainfield and clog it. This can lead to expensive repairs! Follow these guidelines:

- Know the location of your septic tank cover. Keep the cover easily accessible to the pumper.
- Have your septic tank pumped by a licensed pumper every 3 - 5 years.
- Have the pumper inspect the outlet device each time the tank is pumped.
- Do not wash or disinfect the septic tank after it has been pumped.

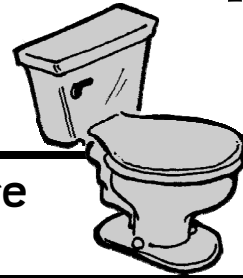
## 2 Use Water Efficiently



As a gallon of wastewater flows into the septic tank from the house, a gallon of effluent flows out of the tank into the drainfield. If too much liquid moves in and out of the tank due to constant or heavy water use, solids might leave the tank and clog the drainfield. Conserve water and spread out water use by following these suggestions:

- Wash only one or two loads of laundry a day.
- Install low-flow fixtures, low-volume toilets, and low-water-use appliances.
- Check for and repair leaky faucets, toilets and other plumbing fixtures.
- Take short showers, and turn off the faucet while brushing your teeth or shaving.

## 3 Think Before You Flush



Your septic tank and drainfield cannot treat all materials. Also, more solids in wastewater will require more frequent septic tank pumping. Follow these tips:

- Your septic system is not a trash can! Don't put dental floss, feminine hygiene products, condoms, diapers, cotton swabs, cigarette butts, coffee grounds, cat litter, paper towels, etc. in the system.
- Do not overuse the garbage disposal. It adds a lot more water and solids to the system! Consider composting kitchen wastes instead.
- Do not put grease or oils down the drain. Pour them into a container with a lid and place in the trash once they cool.
- Do not dump unwanted pesticides, fertilizers, paints, solvents, etc. down the drain. Take them to the Washtenaw County Home Toxics Reduction Center. For more information, please visit <http://recycle.ewashtenaw.org> or call (734) 222-3950.
- Do not dump or flush unwanted or expired medications. Wrap the bottle or package securely with tape and put in the trash or take to a local pharmacy for proper disposal. Visit [www.dontflushdrugs.com](http://www.dontflushdrugs.com) for a current list of participating pharmacies!
- Do not overuse cleaning products, and do not dump or flush excess cleaning products.
- Do not use septic tank starters/feeders. You don't need them! They might also cause more solids to flow into the drainfield, doing more harm than good.

## 4 Protect Your Drainfield



The drainfield does not usually require routine maintenance. However, keep in mind that extra water and soil compaction will keep wastewater from filtering properly, preventing treatment. Follow these tips to protect your drainfield:

- Do not connect any "clear water" wastes (footing drains, roof drains, water softeners, dehumidifiers, etc.) to the septic system.
- Direct water from roofs, down spouts, and the sump pump away from the septic tank(s) and drainfield.
- Do not use underground sprinklers on the drainfield. Only water the drainfield if it is necessary to maintain the grass cover.
- Do not drive vehicles or heavy equipment over the septic tank(s) or drainfield.
- Do not construct driveways, parking lots, sidewalks, patios, or buildings over the septic tank(s) or drainfield. Remember to maintain required setback distances when adding structures to your property.
- Do not put additional soil on the drainfield, other than to fill slight depressions. A slight mounding over the drainfield will allow rain water to run off properly.
- Keep rodents and other burrowing animals out of the drainfield.
- Do not plant trees, deep-rooted plants or gardens on the drainfield.
- Do not site dog kennels or other animal confinement units over the drainfield.
- Install an effluent filter at the septic tank's outlet to reduce the amount of solids entering the drainfield.
- Reserve a replacement drainfield area and treat it like your current drainfield!