

WHAT IS A SEPTIC SYSTEM?

When sewer is not available, onsite waste water treatment systems are used for the treatment of waste water. Septic systems are composed of a septic tank and absorption field and used to treat wastewater from household plumbing produced by bathrooms, kitchen drains, and laundry.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO PROPERLY MAINTAIN MY SEPTIC SYSTEM?

It saves money!

Malfunctioning systems can cost \$3,000-\$7,000 to repair or replace compared to maintenance costs of about \$250-\$500 every three to five years.

It protects the value of your home.

Malfunctioning septic systems can drastically reduce property values, hamper the sale of your home, and even pose a legal liability.

It keeps your water clean and safe.

A properly maintained system helps keep your family's drinking water pure, and reduces the risk of contaminating community, local, and regional waters.

It keeps the environment clean.

Malfunctioning septic systems can harm the local ecosystem by killing native plants, fish, and shellfish.

WHEN SHOULD I CONTACT ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH?

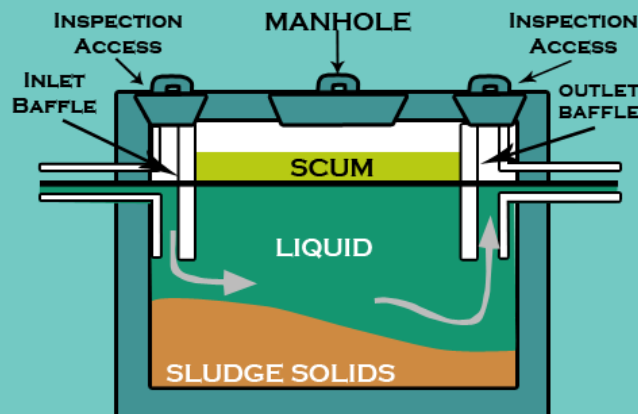
- ◇ If you need to install a new septic system
- ◇ If you need to make a major repair to your septic system
- ◇ If you are remodeling your home
- ◇ If you are adding a pool or additional structure



Protecting People and the Environment

The Homeowner's Guide:

THE PROPER CARE AND MAINTENANCE OF ONSITE WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEMS (OWTS)



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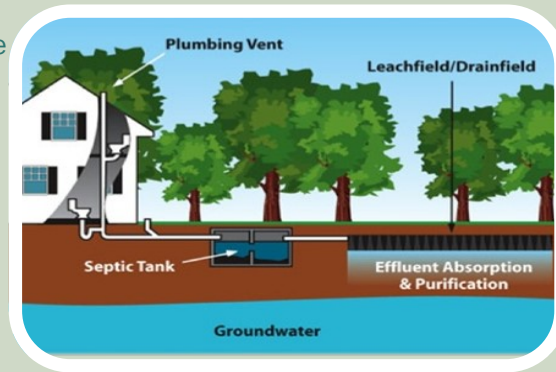
County of Riverside Department of Environmental Health



HOW DOES A SEPTIC SYSTEM WORK?

A typical septic system consists of a septic tank and a absorption field, or soil absorption field. Below is a brief overview of how septic systems work.

- ◇ All water runs out of your house from one main drainage pipe into a septic tank.
- ◇ The septic tank is a buried, water-tight container usually made of concrete, fiberglass, or polyethylene. Its job is to hold the wastewater long enough to allow solids to settle down to the bottom (forming sludge), while the oil and grease float to the top (as scum). Compartments and a T-shaped outlet prevent the sludge and scum from leaving the tank and traveling into the absorption field.
- ◇ The liquid wastewater (effluent) then exits the tank into the absorption field. If the absorption field is overloaded with too much liquid, it will flood, causing sewage to flow to the surface of the ground or create backups in toilets and sinks.
- ◇ Finally, the wastewater percolates into the soil, naturally removing harmful bacteria, and viruses.



DO I HAVE A SEPTIC SYSTEM? IF SO, HOW CAN I FIND IT?

Here are a few tips to determine if you have a septic system and how to locate it. You most likely have a system if:

- ◇ You are on well water.
- ◇ The water line coming into your house does not have a meter.
- ◇ Your neighbors have a septic system.

You can find your septic system by:

- ◇ Looking on the detailed plot plans for your home.
- ◇ Checking your yard for lids or manhole covers.
- ◇ Using an inspector/pumper, who can also help you find exactly where the system is located.

IS MY SEPTIC SYSTEM WORKING PROPERLY?

You can suspect a malfunctioning absorption field if:

1. There are odors, persistent wet spots and/or lush green growth in any areas of your system.
2. Your waste plumbing becomes sluggish over a period of time, when it is being used heavily or during wet weather.
3. Problems persist even though the septic system tank has been pumped or cleaned recently.

WHAT IF MY SEPTIC SYSTEM OVERFLOWS OR HAS MAINTENANCE ISSUES?

ANY DISCHARGE OF SEWAGE MUST BE STOPPED IMMEDIATELY AND PROPERLY DISINFECTED. CONTACT A QUALIFIED SERVICE PROVIDER FOR EVALUATION AND REPAIRS.

HOW DO I MAINTAIN MY SYSTEM?

The most important step in maintaining a trouble-free septic system operation is to remove the accumulated solid residues and scum from the tank BEFORE they start to wash out into the absorption field and BEFORE you begin to observe signs that your system is failing. Your tank should be serviced every 3-5 years or more often depending on the:

- ◇ size of the tank
- ◇ number of people in your household
- ◇ kinds of wastewater discharging appliances you use
- ◇ type of system or filters you use

1

STEP 1 - MINIMIZE THE LIQUID LOAD

The less wastewater you produce, the less the soil will have to absorb. Water conservation is the cheapest and easiest way to protect your septic system.

2

STEP 2 - MINIMIZE THE SOLIDS LOAD

Do not use your septic system for anything that can be disposed of some other way.

- ◇ Avoid using the garbage disposal unit.
- ◇ Reduce the amount of grease, fats, and solids entering the septic system. Do not flush products such as diapers, feminine hygiene products, kitty litter, cigarette butts or coffee grounds.

3

STEP 3 - PROTECT THE INSTALLED SYSTEM

- ◇ Do not plant large trees over the absorption field.
- ◇ Do not allow water to pond over absorption field.
- ◇ Do not park or drive on your absorption field.
- ◇ Keep absorption field in an uncovered open sunny area to provide maximum transpiration.