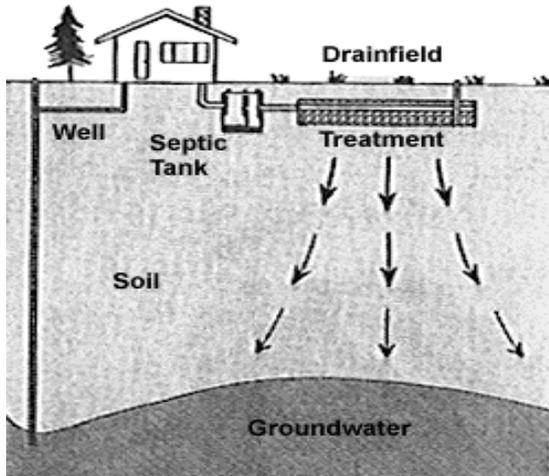


Septic Sense

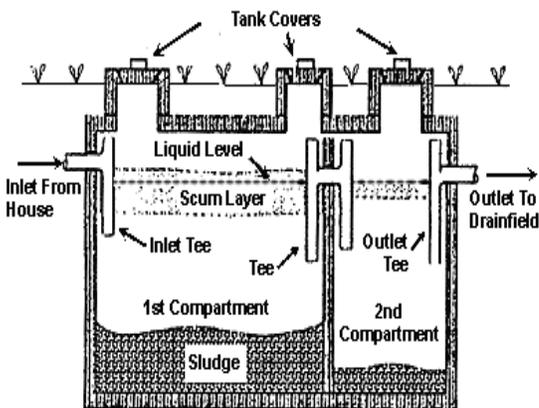
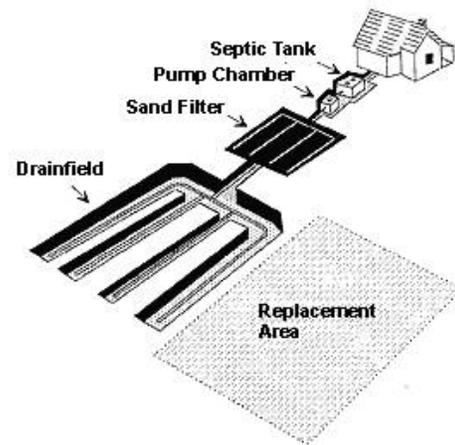


LEARN HOW TO....

- Prolong the life of your septic system
- Protect water quality
- Save money

Your Septic System: The Basics

A standard septic system consists of a septic tank, a drainfield, and a replacement area for the drainfield. Your system may also have a pump chamber between the septic tank and the drainfield.



The Septic Tank

The wastewater from all your household plumbing flows into the septic tank. Solid material settles to the bottom forming the sludge layer, and lighter material floats to the top, forming a scum layer. Naturally occurring bacteria break down the wastes into digested sludge and gases. A clear zone forms in the middle.

Many septic tanks have two compartments. Sludge and scum slowly build up in both compartments and need to be pumped out.

Regular pumping can help prevent the escape of sludge and scum into the drainfield. Sludge and scum can clog the drainfield and cause it to fail.

Most septic tanks need to be pumped every three to five years. Don't wait for a problem—get your tank pumped on a regular schedule! The schedule for your tank will depend on the tank size, amount of water you use, and the type of use it gets. Take the guesswork out of it; hire a septic system professional or inspect the tank yourself.

The Drainfield

As wastewater enters the septic tank from the house, partially treated wastewater is pushed from the tank out into the drainfield. The drainfield is a series of pipes with holes set in a bed of gravel. The wastewater trickles or is pumped through the pipes and trickles through the gravel into the soil. The size and type of drainfield depend on the number of bedrooms in your home and soil conditions. The soil is a very important part of the treatment process. It acts as a natural filter and contains organisms that further treat the wastewater.

If too much wastewater enters the septic tank in a short period of time, the wastewater flows out of the tank before it has had time to settle, forcing solids into the drainfield or pump chamber. To keep this from happening, spread high-volume water use, such as laundry, throughout the week. All homes should have a replacement area where a new drainfield could be installed if the original one becomes unusable. Be careful not to build or plant trees on the drainfield or the replacement area. Do not cover or pave over the drainfield with things like basketball courts, patios, or hot tubs.

Pumps And Pump Tanks

A pump regulates the flow of wastewater to the drainfield. Inspect pumps at least every year to ensure all parts are in working order. Pump tanks should be inspected and cleaned on a regular maintenance schedule.

Alternative Systems

Homes built on sites that do not have adequate soils may require specialized system components such as a mound, sand filter or other alternative or proprietary device. These systems require regular maintenance by trained maintenance specialists.

SIGNS OF FAILURE

Watch for these warning signs that something is wrong. If you notice any one of these signs, call a septic professional. A simple repair done soon can prevent more costly repairs.

- Odors, surfacing sewage
- Wet spots in the drainfield
- Plumbing back-ups
- Slow-draining fixtures
- Gurgling sounds in the plumbing

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I know when to pump?

The rule of thumb is to get your tank pumped every three to five years. If you just moved in, you may want to inspect in two or three years. You can inspect the tank yourself, or hire a professional. Call the Mason County Department of Health Services to get instructions on inspecting the tank or for a list of certified pumpers and maintenance specialists. When you get your tank pumped, the pumper will give you a copy of the report and recommend a pumping schedule.

What can I plant on my drainfield?

The best plants over a drainfield are shallow-rooted ground covers, such as grass and wildflowers. Keep trees at least 30 feet from the drainfield. For a list of appropriate plants, ask for the “*Landscaping Your Drainfield*” brochure.

What can I use to unclog my drains?

First, prevent clogs by using drain traps to keep hair and food from going down the drain. If drains get sluggish, try pouring $\frac{1}{4}$ cup vinegar down the drain, then wash down with boiling water. For more stubborn clogs, try a plumber’s snake or plunger. Use chemical drain openers as a last resort, and do not use more than one dose.

How can I find the location of my septic system?

Call Mason County Environmental Health at (360) 427-9670. Ext. 352. Ask if construction documents (“as-builts”) are available for your septic system. For the quickest response, provide your 12-digit parcel number.

Is it okay to use an additive, such as yeast or a commercial product?

Additives are not needed for proper septic system functioning. Don’t be fooled by ads for miracle cleaners that claim “you will never have to pump again!” Some chemical “cleaners” can destroy your drainfield; others contain harmful chemicals that can pollute water. Pumping your tank regularly is the single most important thing you can do.

Does it matter whether I use a liquid or powdered detergent?

Bulk, economy-size powders may have fillers that can clog the septic tank inlet. Most pumpers and maintenance specialists recommend liquid cleaners.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Conserve to preserve

Conserve water to extend the life of your septic system. Cut your water use in half by installing low flush toilets and water-saving fixtures in faucets and showerheads. Spread out big water uses, like laundry and showers.

Rise above it all

To make it easier to inspect and pump your tank, the next time you have it dug up, install risers on the tank. They make it easier to find your tank opening and save the time or expense of digging.

Watch what goes down the drain

Keep grease, food scraps, and coffee grounds from going down the drain. Put plastics, personal hygiene products, paper towels, and kitty litter in the garbage; not down the toilet.

Don't drown the drainfield

Divert roof drains, surface water, and sump pumps away from the drainfield. If it gets saturated, the drainfield loses its ability to remove pollutants from wastewater.

Questions or requests for more information
about your on-site septic system?

Call us...

Environmental Health
(360) 427-9670 Ext. 352

Mason County Department of Health Services

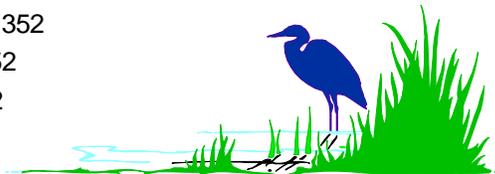
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