

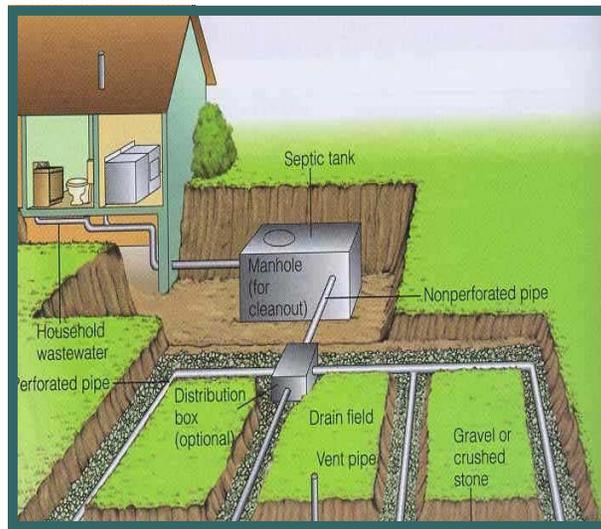
## Homeowners' Responsibilities

You, the homeowner, are responsible for the care and maintenance of your Onsite Sewage Disposal System. With reasonable use and periodic maintenance, your system should last a long time.

Here are some things you should do to insure your system remains in good working order:

- ⇒ Do regular pumping of the septage from the septic tank.
- ⇒ Locate the tank riser (septic tank lid) and keep it marked.
- ⇒ Understand how the system operates, including knowing what the minimum maintenance requirements are for your particular design.
- ⇒ Respond to a failing system with required maintenance, particularly when surfacing of effluent occurs or odors are apparent.
- ⇒ Do not dispose of hazardous household wastes in the septic system.
- ⇒ Recognize the value to the property by having a well-maintained system.
- ⇒ Keep records of the system design, location and maintenance activities (including pumping dates).

Check your septic tank regularly, at least every 3 years, and pump it as needed!



### Increase the life of your septic system

- Use water efficiently
- Plant only grass over and near your septic system. Roots from nearby trees and shrubs can damage the system. Also, do not apply manure or fertilizers over the drainfield
- Keep vehicles and livestock off your septic system. The weight can damage the pipes and tank, and your system may not drain properly under compacted soil
- Keep gutters and basement sump pumps from draining into or near your septic system.

**Columbia County Public Health**

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Columbia County Public Health

## SEPTIC SYSTEM MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

*Information for homeowners on  
the use and maintenance of an  
On-Site Sewage System*



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# SEPTIC SYSTEM MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

## *What is a Septic System?*

Households that are not served by a public sewer system usually depend on septic tanks to treat and dispose of wastewater. Septic systems are individual wastewater treatment systems that use the soil to treat small amounts wastewater from the household's toilets, baths, kitchen, and laundry. A well designed, installed, and maintained septic system can provide years of reliable low-cost service.

A septic system consists of a **septic tank**, a **distribution system** and a **drainfield**, all connected by pipes. The typical septic tank is a large buried rectangular concrete container. Your septic system treats your household wastewater by temporarily holding it in the septic tank where heavy solids settle to the bottom and bacterial action partially decomposes them. Most of the lighter solids rise to the top and form a scum layer. The solids stored in the tank need to be removed by a professional septic tank pumper every three to five years. The wastewater leaving the septic tank is a liquid called effluent. It has been partially treated but still contains disease-causing bacteria and other pollutants.

**A properly functioning septic system does not pollute the groundwater.**

## KEEP OUT!

### Disposable Items Unsuitable for Septics

#### **Kitchen:**

Oil, fats, and grease  
Coffee grounds  
Egg shells  
Drain openers  
Cigarette butts

#### **Bathroom:**

Diapers or disposable wipes  
Kleenex  
Condoms or feminine hygiene products  
Hair or dental floss  
Cat litter (including "flushable varieties")

#### **Laundry Room:**

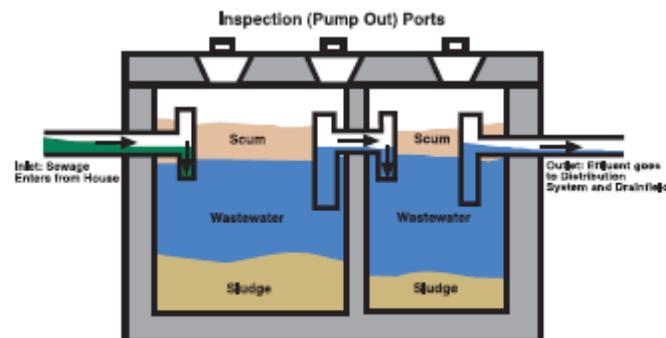
Household cleaners<sup>1</sup>  
Bleach<sup>1</sup>  
Bulk powdered detergents<sup>2</sup>  
Mop or broom lint

#### **Garage:**

Paints or solvents  
Pesticides  
Motor oil or antifreeze  
Gasoline  
Darkroom photo fluids

<sup>1</sup> Okay to use in moderation but not to dispose unused product down the drain.

<sup>2</sup> Choose concentrated laundry detergent to avoid clogging of pipes by fillers added to bulk powders.



## *Prospective Home Buyers*

When purchasing a home, prospective buyers should obtain the following information:

- Septic system location
- Septic system size
- Replacement area location
- Age of the septic system
- Date of last septic tank pumping
- Maintenance or repair records



## *System Failure*

Warning Signs of a Failure Include;

- ⇒ Odors, surfacing sewage, wet spots or lush vegetation growth in the drainfield area.
- ⇒ Plumbing or septic tank backup
- ⇒ Slow draining fixtures
- ⇒ Gurgling sounds in the plumbing system
- ⇒ Well tests show an increase in bacteria or nitrate levels

Contact Columbia County Public Health with any questions or concerns about your septic system.

509.382.2181