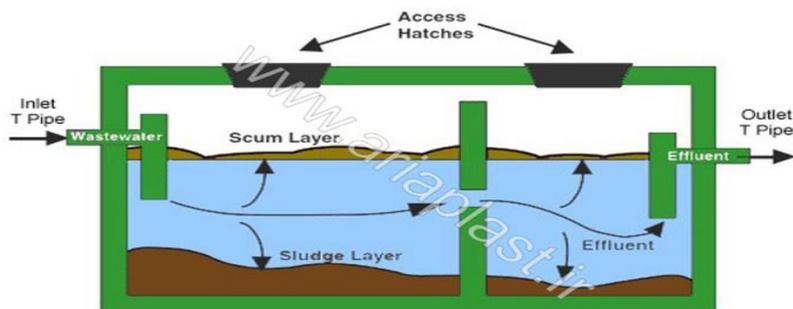


## Septic System Basics



The average home with two baths and three occupants will produce over 85,000 gallons of wastewater annually. This is 250 to 300 gallons per day! Cottage use is probably less as cottages are smaller and not occupied every day, but busy weekends likely contribute more on any given day.

- Septic tanks contain two chambers with an above ground riser (green lids) over each chamber.
- If a septic tank has been retrofitted or installed since 1980 it is likely to include these two tank risers. Effluent filters located in the second chamber have been installed in new tanks in the past 7-8 years.
- The main function of a well-functioning septic system is to separate solids and liquids. Solids settle and remain in the first chamber and liquids migrate into the second chamber before the cleaner water flows into a series of PVC piping into the leaching bed.

### Septic System Failure

- The average life expectancy for a septic system is between 30-40 years. The contamination of the leaching field and age are the predominant factors in system failure. Good Maintenance can extend the life expectancy. Old systems should be replaced that do not meet today's criteria.
- Regular maintenance as described below is critical for system health. 74% of inspections determined that no pump outs were required despite the general misconception that regular pumping is the main form of required maintenance.

### Septic System Maintenance

1. Every 12 to 18 months, open the first green riser, being careful that you or anything else does not fall in to the open riser.
2. With a long measuring stick, measure the depth of the solids. The tank should be pumped (both chambers) if the solid contents measure 33% of the volume of the first chamber. Close the riser.
3. Open the second riser, remove and clean the filter in the second chamber. Install one if none exists. If the filter is clogged water will not exit to the PVC piping causing the tank to overflow.
4. Keep a record of inspections and pumping.
5. Keep the top of your septic bed free of plant growth that has roots extending down to the tile bed such as small bushes and trees.

**Additional Information** - FOCA has excellent information relating to septic systems. It can be found on their web site at the portals below.

<https://foca.on.ca/cottage-country-septic-systems-video/>

<https://foca.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/FOCA-Septic-Systems-Fact-Sheet-2018.pdf>

## The Proper Operation of a Septic System

**The following can kill your septic system and stop treatment of the effluent.** It will lead to the flow of contaminants into the leaching bed and the plugging of the same.

- Harsh chemicals, disinfectants or other anti-septic or anti-bacterial products.
- Garden pesticides, herbicides, paints (oil or latex), paint cleaners.
- Bleach pucks and sanitizers in toilets, all detergents with bleach (**if it kills germs, it harms septic systems**).

**The following do not degrade easily and accumulate in the septic tank.**

- Inorganic materials such as plastics, cigarettes, disposable diapers, condoms, sanitary napkins etc.
- Cooking oils, any grease (e.g. bacon fat), hair gels, conditioners, etc.

### Also Avoid

- High “sudsing” detergents.
- Garbage disposal units such as garburators.
- Excessive food scraps in sink.
- leaking toilets or faucets.
- laundry and dish detergent with bleach or phosphate, anti-dandruff medicated shampoos, disinfectant soaps.

### Good Habits

- Divert food, oils, grease, facial napkins, coffee grounds, bones and other materials to the garbage or compost. Strainers in the kitchen sink are important to keep food out of the system.
- Spread laundry over several days if possible
- Do not use disinfectant soaps no matter how “natural” they are.
- Pump out the septic tank using a reputable contractor on a regular basis that reflects its use or when inspection deems it necessary. This may be from every 3 to 10 years. Over pumping is expensive and unnecessary. (This is a good opportunity to inspect your system when it is pumped out and install a discharge filter if your system does not have one.)

**Remember - The Septic system is not a garbage disposal system.**

**It is a living system – Do not Overuse or Kill it.**