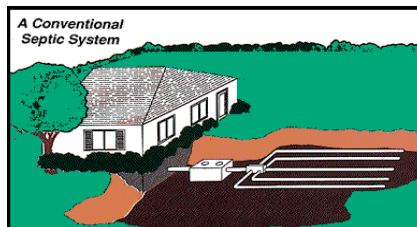


CARE OF YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM



How Does a Septic System Work?

A septic system, properly installed and maintained, is a good way to treat wastewater and to protect groundwater quality when municipal sewer service is not available. A typical septic system consists of two major parts: the **septic tank** and **drainfield**.

Waste from toilets, sinks, washing machines, and showers enters the **septic tank**, which is a holding tank generally made of pre-cast concrete or fiberglass and is sized according to the estimated wastewater flow from a given-sized residence or business.

The septic tank separates the wastewater into three general components – solids or “sludge”, floatables or the “scum level”, and a zone of relatively clear water. Anaerobic bacteria (able to live in an oxygen-free environment) perform the first treatment of the wastewater, generating gas that is vented through the vent stack of the building’s plumbing, and breaking the solids into a liquid form. The oxygen-free conditions inside the septic tank also deactivate some of the disease germs that are found in sewage.

From the septic tank, the liquid portion of the wastewater flows into the **drainfield**, which is generally a series of perforated pipes or slotted panels that are usually surrounded by a layer of gravel, tire chips, or other lightweight materials such as Styrofoam pieces. The drainfield provides secondary treatment of the sewage by allowing aerobic (oxygen-using) bacteria to continue deactivating the disease germs that remain in the wastewater. The drainfield also provides filtration of the wastewater as gravity draws the water downwards through the soil layers. In addition, evaporation of water occurs through the layer of soil covering the drainfield.

DO'S

DO conserve water ~ the less water you use, the less wastewater your septic system will have to process! Look into installing water-conserving shower-heads, toilets or other water-saving features.

DO have your septic tank pumped out periodically. Taconic Shores Property Owners’ Assoc., requires that septic tanks be pumped out **every five years** to reduce accumulations of sludge in the tank (see the Blue Book).

DO check your plumbing for leaks on a regular basis. A leaking toilet flapper valve can let hundreds of gallons of waste water into your septic system, causing stoppages and overloaded drain fields.

DO consult your local health department for more information. Our Environmental Health Professionals can provide you with many tips and information to help your septic system last as long as possible.

Contact the Columbia County Health Department by calling (518) 828-3358 for more information.

DON'TS

DON'T flush cigarette butts, tampons, condoms, or other indigestible materials down the toilets or sinks. These will clog the outlet filter or drainfield.

DON'T pour grease down the drains ~ grease **cannot** be digested by the septic system and will clot it! Instead, pour the grease into an empty can or bottle and discard it with the trash.

DON'T use excessive amounts of bleach or other cleaning products ~ too much will interfere with the bacterial action in the septic tank. **Small amounts** of household bleach or laundry detergent can be used without ill effects.

DON'T do several loads of laundry back-to-back ~ instead, **space your wash loads out over the week** so that the septic system does not have to process so much water (a typical wash load uses between **60 & 90** gallons per load!)

DON'T plant trees or shrubbery near or over your drain field. **Roots** from trees and plants will grow into the drain lines and clog them.

DON'T allow vehicles to drive over **any** part of your septic system. Traffic over your drain field can crush the pipes or pack down the soil around them, and driving over the septic tank can cause the tank's lid to crack or break apart!