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Septic System Maintenance

About 23,000 households in Licking County are located outside of areas served by central sewers and must treat and dispose of wastewater on their own lots. Like all of the appliances and structures in your home, sewage treatment systems require care and will eventually have to be upgraded or even replaced. Cities hire professional operators to take care of their sewage treatment systems. For homes with individual sewage treatment systems, the homeowner is responsible for providing care and maintenance.

The most common type of sewage treatment system is as septic tank and leaching tile field.

The septic tank provides a small portion of the treatment by creating a large quiet compartment to allow solid material to settle out of the wastewater and collect in the tank. Once the large solid material is settled out, the sewage flows into the leaching tile field where the soil and microorganisms growing in the soil remove the pollutants before the wastewater enters ground or surface water.

Septic systems are simple to operate and when properly designed, constructed, and maintained, they do an excellent job of removing pollutants from wastewater.

Proper maintenance and operation are required for these systems to operate without causing system backup or pollution.

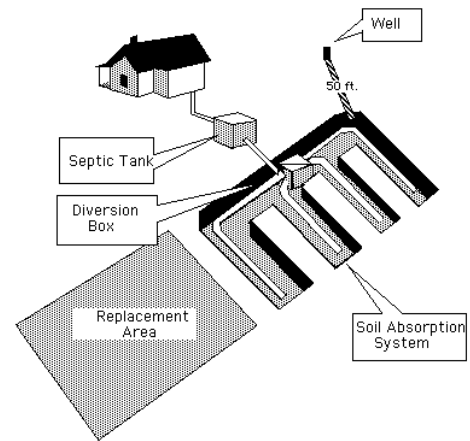


Diagram of a septic system.

Conserve Water

Since the soil must accept all of the water used in your home, using less water is the best thing a resident can do to maintain their septic system. Water conservation includes:

- Repair water leaks, such as toilet valves that don't seal and dripping faucets.
- Space out water use throughout the day and week. For example, avoid washing all of your laundry on one day.
- Install water conserving fixtures like low flow shower heads, low flow toilets, and even purchase a front-loading washing machine.

Careful Landscaping

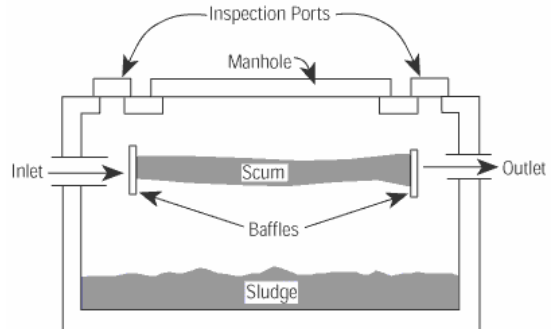
The soil absorption system (or leach field) is the most important part of a septic system, so it is important to protect the area. Careful landscaping includes:

- Diverting downspouts and other rainwater drainage away from the soil absorption system area. The extra rainwater can overwhelm the leach field.
- Parking cars, boats, other vehicles, or heavy equipment away from the soil absorption system area. If the soil is compacted, the leach field has difficulty accepting wastewater, causing it to surface in the yard or back-up into the house.

- Keeping pavement, decks, above ground pools, and out buildings off of and away from the soil absorption system area. Construction activity can compact the soil and the structures limit access to the leach field for maintenance.
- Not putting additional soil fill over the soil absorption system area. Increasing the depth of soil over the leach field limits the infiltration of air into the soil needed by the microorganisms to renovate wastewater.

Pump Septic Tank

Septic tanks are installed to allow solids to settle out of sewage and hold these solids in the tank. Over the years of operating, accumulated solids begin taking up too much room in the tank, reducing the volume available for settling. When this happens, solids start escaping the tank and can clog the soil in the soil absorption field. Before this happens, the septic tank should be pumped to remove the solids.



- Do not wait for the system to back-up before you pump your septic tank. Back-ups can be caused by clogging of the soil from sewage solids carried out of an un-maintained septic tank. Once the sewage backs-up, the damage is already done.
- Do not use biological or chemical additive in place of septic tank pumping.
- Pump the tank based on the size of the tank and the number of people using it. The table is a guide for routine septic tank pumping. More frequent pumping is necessary if garbage disposals are used.
- When the tank is pumped, have the baffles inspected. If they are missing or deteriorated, the tank will short circuit and not work properly. Have the baffles replaced with sanitary tees.
- Never enter a septic tank. Any work or repairs should be made from the outside. The septic tank produces toxic gases that can kill a person in a matter of minutes. at the top of the tank to blow in fresh air.
- To facilitate future cleaning, install risers to the surface of the ground before burying the tank.

Table 1. Estimate Septic Tank Pumping Frequencies in Years (For Year-Round Residence)

Tank Size (gal)	Household Size (Number of People)									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
500	5.8	2.6	1.5	1.0	0.7	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.1	—
750	9.1	4.2	2.6	1.8	1.3	1.0	0.7	0.6	0.4	0.3
1000	12.4	5.9	3.7	2.6	2.0	1.5	1.2	1.0	0.8	0.7
1250	15.6	7.5	4.8	3.4	2.6	2.0	1.7	1.4	1.2	1.0
1500	18.9	9.1	5.9	4.2	3.3	2.6	2.1	1.8	1.5	1.3
1750	22.1	10.7	6.9	5.0	3.9	3.1	2.6	2.2	1.9	1.6
2000	25.4	12.4	8.0	5.9	4.5	3.7	3.1	2.6	2.2	2.0
2250	28.6	14.0	9.1	6.7	5.2	4.2	3.5	3.0	2.6	2.3
2500	31.9	15.6	10.2	7.5	5.9	4.8	4.0	4.0	3.0	2.6

Note: More frequent pumping needed if garbage disposal is used.