

Preventing Failures

Septic systems fail when the drainfield does not dispose of sewage as rapidly as it is being added to the system. Therefore, improvements that reduce the amount of incoming water or improve the quality of wastewater passing through the system will increase the system's life. Other important considerations:

A drainfield can be damaged by compaction due to vehicular traffic and can be blocked by excessive shrubbery or tree root growth. The drainfield should be unobstructed and seeded with grass. Grass and sunlight aid evaporation.

Washing machines are responsible for large volumes of water entering the septic system (average 40-60 gallons per load). The surge of wash water can create turbulence in the tank which increases the amount of solids flushed out into the drainfield. Space washings throughout the week rather than doing many loads at a time.

Cooking oils and grease are troublemakers. The type of bacteria found in septic tanks and drainfields do not survive or function well in solidified grease. Grease and cooking fats should never be washed down the sink drain. Save grease in jars or cans for disposal in the garbage.

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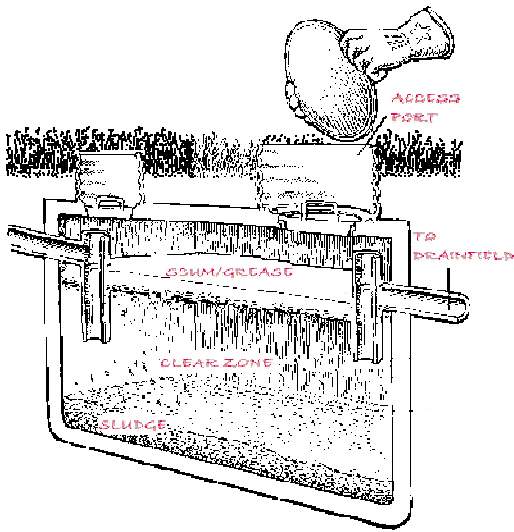
Do's

- Know the location and capacity of your septic system.
- Have the tank pumped every 3 to 5 years.
- Be sure rainfall, downspouts, and surface water flow away from the system.
- Grow grass above the system.
- Install water conservation devices to reduce the volume of water entering the system.
- Keep plumbing fixtures such as toilets and faucets in good repair to prevent leakage and wasting of water.
- Spread your laundry out. Do one load a day rather than 4-5 loads in one day.
- Don't run the washer in water usage prime-times, such as when toilets and bathtubs are in demand.

Don'ts

- Don't use a garbage disposal and don't dump coffee grounds down the drain. Fats and oils will clog the system. The more solids in the tank, the more often it should be pumped out.
- Don't use the toilet as a trash can. Put paper towels, facial tissues, cigarette butts, disposable diapers, kitty litter, condoms, and feminine hygiene products in the trash, not down the toilet.
- Additives such as enzymes or yeasts have not been proven to improve septic system performance.
- Harsh chemicals can kill the good bacteria in your septic tank.
- Don't drive or park over the drainfield. Don't locate garages, pools, or parking areas over the field.
- Don't waster water.





What is a Septic System?

A septic system consists of a large, watertight tank that receives wastewater from the home plumbing system. The tank is followed by an underground drainfield consisting of perforated pipe through which the partially treated waste water is distributed to the soil for final treatment and disposal.

How Does it Work?

Septic tanks contain bacteria that grow best in oxygen-poor conditions. These bacteria carry out a portion of the treatment process by converting most solids into liquids and gases. Bacteria that require oxygen thrive in the drainfield and complete the treatment process. If the septic tank is working well, the wastewater flowing out of it is relatively clear, although it still has an odor and may carry disease organisms. It should flow only into the drainfield – NEVER onto the ground surface or into surface waters.

Operation and Maintenance

After the septic tank is placed in service, proper operation and maintenance of the system will ensure continued efficient service and prevent sudden replacement expenses. The septic tank and drainfield are designed to handle a maximum daily sewage flow (currently 450 gallons per day for a typical modern 3-bedroom system). Consistently exceeding the design flow will eventually overload the system and cause failure. The tank may receive new solids faster than it can treat them and the drainfield may become saturated from excessive water use.

Various products on the market are said to start, accelerate, or improve bacterial action in the tank. Such products are not proven and are not recommended.

Maintenance of the septic tank will largely depend on the daily sewage flow and individual household wastewater usage. With ordinary use and care, a septic tank should not require pumping more than once every 3 to 5 years. It should, however, be inspected to determine the depth of accumulated sludge and grease.

Waste from a kitchen garbage disposal puts an extra load on the septic system by adding additional solids to the tank. You may need to have your tank pumped more often if you regularly use a garbage disposal.

Failure to pump the tank when indicated will result in the solids and grease overflowing into the drainfield pipes, which in turn may become clogged and stop functioning.

Tanks should only be cleaned by professional septic tank pumping firms. Check the Yellow Pages for more information.

Location

Contaminants can travel long distances in some soils. Drinking water wells should be located at least 50 feet from any part of a septic system.

Call your local health department for a copy of your septic permit. It will include a layout of your system, the location of the tank, distribution box, and lateral lines. In Harrison County, records of septic systems only go back to 1975, so keep that in mind.

Record

Permit number _____

Tank capacity _____

Drainfield size _____ sq. ft.

Maintenance Record

Date	Service Provided	Contractor Name
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____