

## HOW YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM WORKS

A septic system is designed to treat wastewater from your home directly on your property. Understanding how it works can help you protect your system, avoid costly repairs, and extend its lifespan.

### SEPTIC TANK

Wastewater from your home flows into the septic tank, where it begins the treatment process.

Inside the tank, materials naturally separate:

- Heavier solids settle to the bottom (sludge)
- Oils and grease rise to the top (scum)
- The clearer liquid in the middle flows out to the drainfield

Beneficial bacteria inside the tank begin breaking down waste, but the tank's primary role is separation -not complete treatment.

### DRAINFIELD

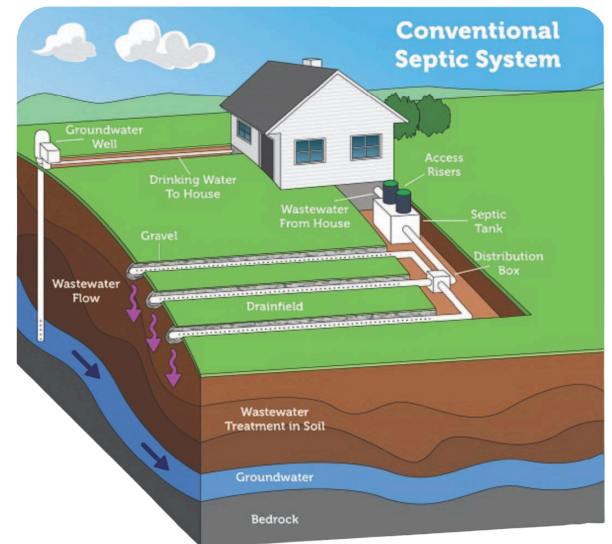
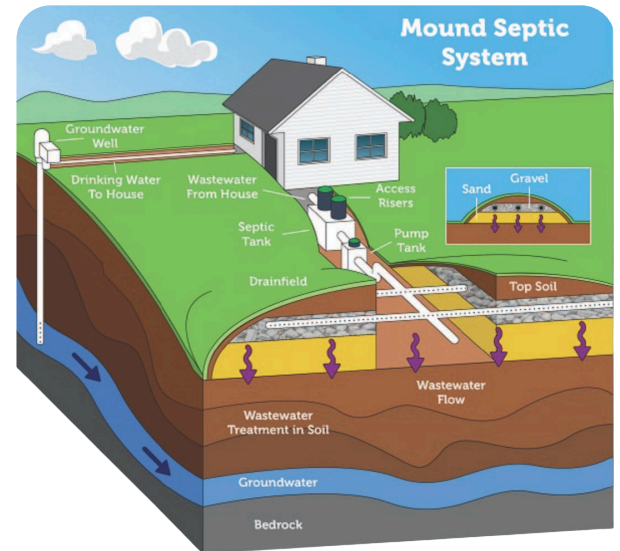
The drainfield receives the liquid from the septic tank and distributes it into the surrounding soil. As wastewater moves through the soil, it is naturally filtered and treated by microorganisms. Because the drainfield is responsible for final treatment, it is also the most important and most expensive part of the system to replace.

### WHY PUMPING THE TANK IS IMPORTANT:

Over time, solids accumulate inside every septic tank. The primary purpose of the septic tank is to keep solids from reaching the drainfield. If the tank is not pumped periodically, those solids can begin to leave the tank and enter the drainfield. When this happens, it can lead to:

- Plumbing back ups
- Slow drains
- Wet or smelly areas in the yard
- Premature system failure

In many cases, septic systems that fail prematurely do so because solids eventually reach the drainfield. Pumping removes these solids before they have a chance to cause damage.



### PUMPING FREQUENCY

Most septic systems should be pumped approximately every 2-3 years. The proper schedule depends on:

- Household size
- Water usage
- Septic tank size

Everything that goes down your drains eventually ends up in your septic system -whether it is flushed down the toilet, poured down the sink, or sent through appliances such as washing machines and dishwashers. Because septic systems treat wastewater on your own property, what goes down the drain directly affects how well your system works.



## KITCHEN SINK

Your septic system contains a collection of living organisms that digest & treat household waste. Pouring harmful substances down the drain can kill these beneficial bacteria and interfere with the treatment process. Many materials that are commonly poured down kitchen drains do not break down easily. These materials can accumulate inside the tank and increase the risk of clogs or long term system issues.

To help protect your system:

- Avoid chemical drain openers -use boiling water or a drain snake instead
- Never pour oil-based paints, solvents, or large amounts of toxic cleaners down the drain
- Even latex paint waste should be minimized



## BATHROOM DRAINS

Water from showers, bathtubs, and bathroom sinks also enters your septic system. While these drains may seem harmless, they can introduce materials that do not break down easily. Hair soap residue, and certain personal care products can accumulate over time and contribute to clogs or increased solids inside the tank. Using drain screens and being mindful of what enters these drains can help reduce buildup and improve system performance.

- Use hair screens
- Avoid antibacterial soap overuse



## TOILETS

Flushing the wrong items down the toilets can cause clogs, damage system components, and interfere with the natural treatment process. Many items do not break down properly in septic systems and should never be flushed. Toilets should generally be used for human waste and toilet paper.

Items that should never be flushed include:

- Flushable wipes, baby wipes, or cleaning wipes
- Feminine hygiene products
- Condoms
- Dental Floss
- Diapers
- Cigarette Butts
- Coffee Grounds
- Cat litter
- Paper Towels
- Pharmaceuticals

### DID YOU KNOW?

*The average indoor water use in a typical single-family home can be as much as 70 gallons per individual, per day. Just a single leaky or running toilet can add as much as 200 gallons of water per day!*



## GARBAGE DISPOSAL

Garbage Disposals can significantly increase the amount of solids entering your septic tank. Food waste does not break down as easily as many homeowners expect. As a result, frequent use of a garbage disposal can cause the septic tank to fill more quickly and may require more frequent pumping. For this reason, limiting use or composting food waste instead, can help extend the life of your system.

### When in Doubt, Throw It Out!

If you're unsure whether something is safe for your septic system, it's almost always better to dispose of it in the trash rather than send it down the drain.

### A simple rule to remember:

If it didn't come from your body or isn't toilet paper, it probably doesn't belong in your septic system.

# USE WATER EFFICIENTLY

All of the water in your home eventually enters your septic system. The more water a household sends down its pipes, the harder the system must work to treat wastewater. Using water efficiently helps your septic system operate properly and reduces the risk of malfunctions



## TOILETS

Toilet use can account for 25-30% of household water use. Many older homes have toilets with 3.5-5 gallon reservoirs, while newer high efficiency toilets use 1.6 gallons of water or less per flush. Replacing existing toilets with high efficiency models is an easy way to reduce the amount of household water entering your septic system.

- 25-30% of water use
- Upgrade to high efficiency



## WASHING MACHINES

Running several loads of laundry in a single day can send a large surge of water into your septic system. This can prevent the septic tank from having enough time to properly treat wastewater and may overload the drainfield. Try to spread laundry loads throughout the week and select the appropriate load size when using your washing machine.

- Spread loads throughout the week
- Avoid doing all laundry in one day



## SUMP PUMPS

A basement sump pump system is designed to discharge clear groundwater and should never be connected to a septic system. The sheer amount of water a sump pump can introduce can quickly overload the system and potentially cause drainfield failure. In addition, clear water entering the septic tank dilutes the wastewater and can disrupt the bacteria needed for proper treatment. Sump pump discharge should always be directed away from the septic system.

- NEVER connect to septic
- Can overload system quickly



## WATER SOFTENERS

Although there is some debate, most septic professionals agree that water softeners shouldn't discharge into the septic system. During regeneration, water softeners release a concentrated brine solution & a large volume of water. The added water increases the load on the system, while the salt can disrupt the natural separation of solids inside the septic tank. This may allow solids to move into downstream components and potentially shorten the life of the system.

- Add extra water
- Introduce salt
- May disrupt tank function



## FAUCETS

Fix leaky faucets. A small drip from a faucet adds gallons of unnecessary water to your septic system every day. To see how much a leak adds to your water usage, place a cup under the drip for 10 minutes. Multiply the amount of water in the cup by 144 (the number of minutes in 24 hours, divided by 10). Just one cup of leaky faucet water every 10 minutes equals 36 wasted gallons of water a day—and they all end up in your septic system. Faucet aerators and high-efficiency showerheads can also help.

- Fix leaks immediately!
- Install high efficiency fixtures

**Your Septic System Can Only Handle So Much Water. Every drop of water used in your home flows into your septic system. When too much water enters the system in a short period of time, it can overwhelm the septic tank and drainfield, reducing their ability to properly treat wastewater. Spreading water use throughout the day and week helps your system work the way it was designed.**

Your drainfield is one of the most important components of your septic system. It is responsible for removing contaminants from the wastewater that leaves the septic tank and allowing the soil to complete the treatment process. Because the drainfield is buried underground and out of sight, it is often overlooked. However, it is also the **most expensive part of the system to repair or replace**, making proper care essential.

## WHY PROTECTING YOUR DRAINFIELD IS IMPORTANT:

The drainfield is designed to receive properly treated wastewater from the septic tank. When functioning correctly, it slowly disperses this water into the surrounding soil, where natural processes complete the treatment. If the drainfield becomes overloaded, compacted, or clogged, it may no longer be able to properly treat wastewater. When this happens, the system can begin to show signs of failure. Common problems may include slow draining fixtures, sewage odors, standing water in the yard, or even wastewater backing up into the home. In many cases, once a drainfield is damaged, repairs are limited and replacement may be required.

## PHYSICAL DAMAGE TO THE DRAINFIELD

Drainfields are not designed to support heavy weight. Driving vehicles or operating heavy equipment over the area can compact the soil and damage the pipes below the surface. Compacted soil restricts the movement of air and water, which are both necessary for proper wastewater treatment. Similarly, building structures such as sheds, patios, or driveways over the drainfield can prevent oxygen from reaching the soil and interfere with the system's ability to function. Tree and shrub roots can also pose a risk. Roots naturally seek out moisture and can grow into drainfield pipes, causing blockages or damage over time. For these reasons, it is best to keep the drainfield clear of traffic, structures, and deep-rooted vegetation.



## Simple Guidelines to Protect Your Drainfield:

- Keep vehicles and heavy equipment off the drainfield
- Avoid building structures or hard surfaces over the drainfield
- Do not plant trees or large shrubs nearby
- Direct gutters and sump pumps away from the system
- Maintain a regular septic pumping schedule

## HOW PUMPING PROTECTS THE DRAINFIELD:

The septic tank plays a critical role in protecting the drainfield by separating solids from the wastewater. **The primary purpose of the septic tank is to keep solids from reaching the drainfield.** Over time, solids build up inside the tank. If they are not removed through regular pumping, they can begin to leave the tank and enter the drainfield. Once solids reach the drainfield, they can clog the soil and pipes, reducing the system's ability to function properly. Regular pumping helps remove these solids before they have a chance to cause damage, making it one of the most important steps in protecting the drainfield and extending the life of the system.

# DOES YOUR SYSTEM HAVE AN EFFLUENT FILTER?

Does your system have an effluent filter? The effluent filter acts as an important barrier, helping protect your drainfield by preventing solids from leaving the septic tank. Effluent filters have been required on all systems installed in the State of Wisconsin since July of 2000. The filter is designed to keep solids and other particles larger than 1/8 inch from escaping the septic tank and entering your drainfield.

Periodic servicing of the filter is required to maintain its effectiveness and ensure proper operation of the system. Most filters should be serviced every six months, while others may require more frequent attention depending on manufacturer requirements and household use.

Neglecting to clean the filter can lead to serious consequences, including sewage backups inside your home. The good news is that servicing an effluent filter is a relatively simple task that homeowners can usually perform themselves with a garden hose.

We're always happy to walk you through the process if you'd like to handle it on your own. Or, if you prefer, we can add you to our filter maintenance route that we run each spring and fall.



**PRO TIP! A clean filter in Spring and Fall helps prevent backups and protects your Septic System!**

*Pictured:  
Removing a dirty effluent filter  
and replacing it after cleaning*

