

The septic tank is a large holding and wastewater processing unit that is buried underground. Unless you've watched the installation process, you'll most likely only notice the tank by the exposed cleanout openings and the manhole cover. However, even though most of the unit is concealed, it is still very important to be observant of the location of the tank at all times. Damage to the septic tank and the connection to your home can cause very unpleasant problems, such as sewage backing up into your home or leaking into your yard. Refer to your as-built to determine the entire area in which your septic tank is located. You are responsible for keeping the septic tank and sewer line accessible.

Keep the area free and clear of trees, shrubs, decks, patios, and playground equipment. To avoid damage, do not drive vehicles or heavy equipment over the septic tank or sewer line. Keep livestock off the area.

There are three distinct layers of materials in the septic tank: The scum layer, wastewater, and sludge. The scum layer is comprised of floating solids such as grease and fat, which can form a hardened crust over time. As the solids settle to the bottom of the septic tank, they form what is called the sludge layer. The sludge layer continues to build up over time and eventually will require professional removal. The general guideline is to have your septic tank pumped every three to five years, but it really does depend on individual home usage and how selective you are as to what solid materials pass through your system. The wastewater that is between the two layers of solids is called effluent. The effluent is partially treated by anaerobic bacteria present in the tank, and it will continue to flow out of the tank through the next portion of the sewer system. Do note, the septic tank normally operates at a full level of liquid.

Flammable sewer gases are formed in the septic tank, and they will be present when the cover to the tank is open. To keep your sludge layer to a lower level and to ensure proper operation of your septic tank, you should not flush diapers, tampons, and sanitary napkins down the toilet. Also avoid flushing excess quantities of paper. It's important to be selective about what goes down the sink drains, too. Do not pour oils, grease, and kitchen refuse into the drain. Do not allow coffee grounds, tobacco products, or any rubber items to enter the system.

Keeping unwanted objects out of the septic tank will keep it operating properly. Do not pour strong detergents or disinfectants down the drain or into the septic tank. Daily use of mild household soaps and cleansers is safe. A small amount of bleach used for household cleaning and laundry is generally fine, but do not flush excess bleach or chlorine tablets. Do not introduce any chemical waste into the system.

A standard drain field is a series of perforated pipes in a gravel bed that allows water to leave the septic tank and absorb back into the ground. A chamber system includes a series of underground plastic pipes that work in much the same way, but in different soil types. The absorption field usually extends about ten feet out from the septic tank, covering up to about five thousand square feet.

It's very important to take care of the ground above the absorption field to avoid damage to the pipes or chambers. Crushed pipes and chambers can cause wastewater to flood your yard, and even cause a sewage back-up to the septic tank and into your home.

The water that exists in the chamber system pipes will continue to purify as it filters through the Earth. The water is safe for the land but you still want to take some precautions. Do not plant crops for human consumption over the drain field. Make sure that any new wells are drilled at least one hundred feet away from the absorption field to avoid contamination of drinking water.