

### What are Septic Systems?

Septic systems are individual wastewater treatment systems that use the soil to treat small wastewater flows, usually from individual homes. They are typically used in rural or large lot settings where centralized wastewater treatment is impractical.

A typical system consists of two major components, a septic tank and an absorption field. This system treats your household wastewater by temporarily holding it in the septic tank where heavy solids and lighter scum are allowed to separate from the wastewater. This separation process is known as the primary treatment. The solids stored in the tank are decomposed by bacteria and later removed along with the lighter scum by a professional septic tank pumper.

#### Septic Tank

Three factors determine how often your septic tank will have to be pumped. The first factor is the size of the tank itself. A typical tank is designed to hold 1,000-1,200 gallons of liquid. The second factor is the number of people in the household. Obviously, the more people in the household, the more wastewater will flow through the system. The third factor is the volume of solids in the wastewater. For example, if you have a garbage disposal in your house, then you will have to pump out your tank more frequently than those who dispose of their garbage by other means.

#### Absorption Field

An absorption field generally does not require any maintenance. However, to protect and prolong the life of the absorption field, follow these simple rules:

Do not drive or park over the absorption field with cars, trucks, or heavy equipment: compaction of the field will reduce its ability to filter and treat wastewater.

Do not plant anything but grass over the system. Roots from trees and shrubbery may clog your absorption field, preventing it from properly treating waste.

Divert surface runoff water from roofs, patios, driveways and other areas away from the absorption field. Keep sump pumps and house footing drains away from the system as well.

## Is Your Septic System Failing?

There are several indicators that your septic system may not be functioning properly:

1. Slow-draining sinks and toilets
2. Plumbing backups
3. Sewage odors in the house or out in the yard
4. The ground is wet or mushy above your absorption field
5. The grass is greener or grows faster above your absorption field
6. Tests show the presence of bacteria in nearby streams or wells.

**If your septic system exhibits any of these signs, contact a professional to assess the situation.**



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# So Now You Own a Septic System

## A Reference Guide for Residents



[www.acwater.org](http://www.acwater.org)

## Taking Care of Your Septic System

### Use Water Wisely

When the septic system's absorption field is waterlogged, its ability to treat waste is hindered.

- 💧 When it's feasible, conserve water and allow time between activities that require a lot of water, like using washing machines and dishwashers, and taking baths and showers.
- 💧 Consider using a front-loading washing machine, which can use up to 1/3 less water than top-loading machines.
- 💧 Toilets consume large amounts of water and most use 3-5 gallons per flush. Install a water-saving design that uses only 1.5 gal/flush. For an older toilet, place a milk jug filled with sand or stones in the tank to reduce the amount of water used.
- 💧 To conserve water in the shower, install a low-flow shower head.

### Pump Your Septic Tank Regularly & Have it Inspected Annually

- 💧 Pumping your septic tank removes solids and prevents them from clogging the absorption field. Have a professional pump out your septic tank every 3-5 years.
- 💧 Annual inspections will catch problems early, avoiding environmental contamination and possibly lowering the cost of repairs.

### What Not to Put Down the Drain

- ! -Hazardous chemicals should never be rinsed down your drain; they may kill the waste-digesting bacteria and micro-organisms working in your septic system.
- ! -Use garbage disposals sparingly and avoid putting anything down the toilet or drain that will not easily break down. Solids build up in your septic tank and affect your system's ability to treat waste.
- ! -Septic tank additives are generally not beneficial; some may actually harm the system.
- Fats, oils and grease (FOG) should never be rinsed down your drain.



#### Who to Contact

**Fort Wayne-Allen County  
Department of Health**

(260) 449-7561

**Allen County Partnership for  
Water Quality**

(260) 449-7139

### Why Maintain Your Septic System?

Failing septic systems are very expensive to repair or replace.

**Compare: \$50-\$250 to have your septic system inspected or pumped; \$3,000-\$10,000 to have it repaired or replaced.**

A neglected septic system could reduce the value of your property.

A failing septic system can cause a serious threat to the health of family members or your neighbors, especially if your drinking water comes from a well.

A failing septic system can degrade the environment, especially nearby waterways. It can put thousands of water-users at risk if it is located near a public water supply. The picture below illustrates how septic system effluent can reach a groundwater supply.

