Septic System
Maintenance & Inspection
Pocket Guide

Texas Water
Resources Institute
make every drop count

EM-126

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November 2019

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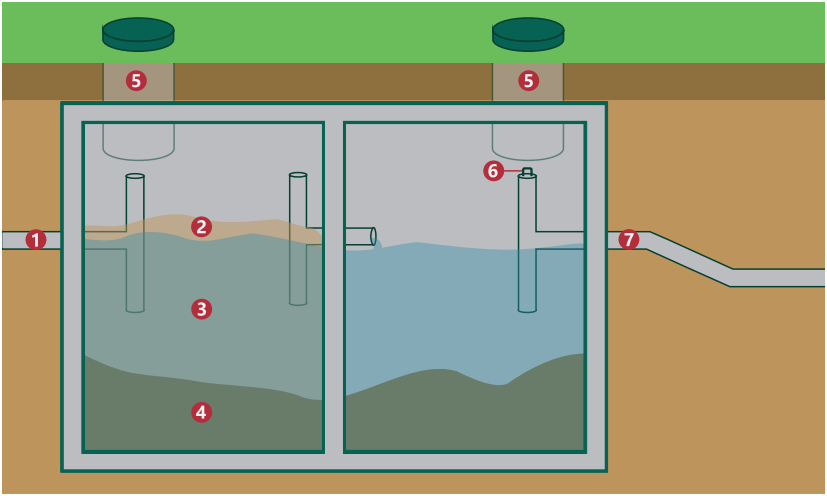
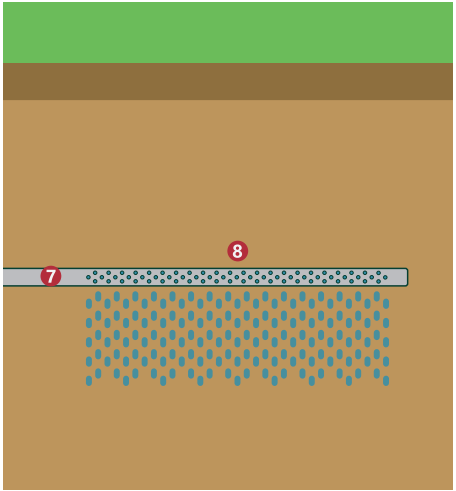
Septic Systems:

- Are designed to treat wastewater “on-site”
- Have various components depending on which type of system you have
- Require regular maintenance to ensure proper functionality
- Should be inspected regularly for signs of failure

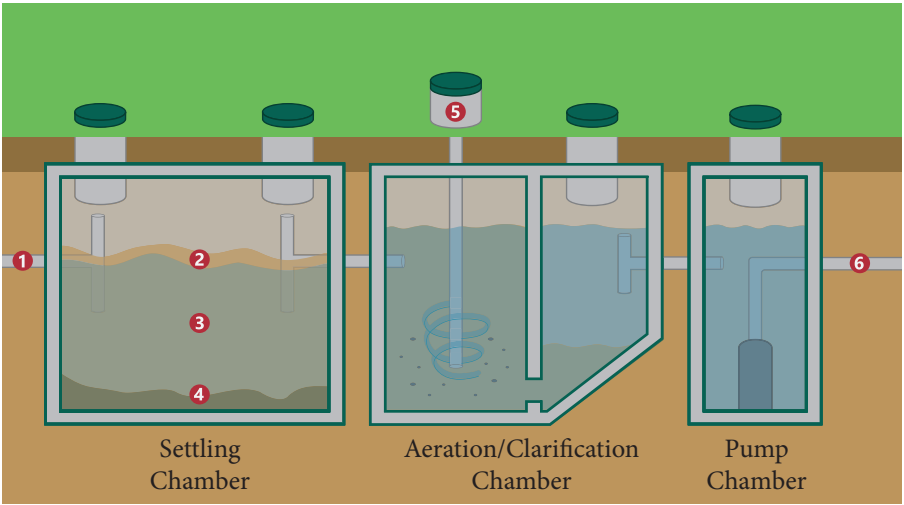
Conventional Septic System

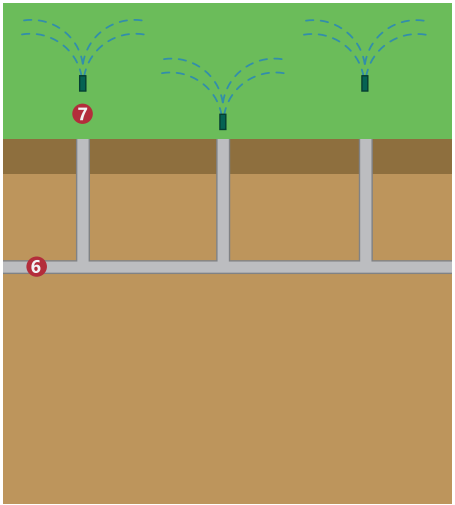




1. Inlet
2. Scum layer
3. Settling layer
4. Sludge layer
5. Access riser
6. Effluent screen
7. Outlet
8. Drainfield

Aerobic Treatment System





1. Inlet
2. Scum layer
3. Settling layer
4. Sludge layer
5. Access riser
6. Outlet
7. Sprayfield

Maintenance Tips for a Longer Lasting Septic System

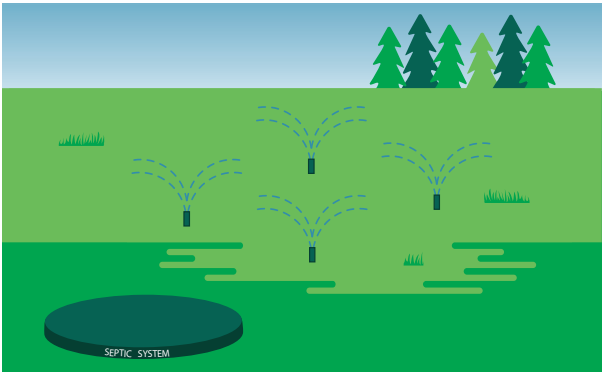
The following are standard maintenance practices that will help keep your system healthy:

Regular Septic Tank Pumping

- Contact a septic service technician to measure the level of solids in your tank.
- Pump out septic tanks every 3-5 years or when total solids in the tank reach 25-33% of tank capacity.
- Make sure pumping is done during dry seasons to reduce the risk of tank flotation.

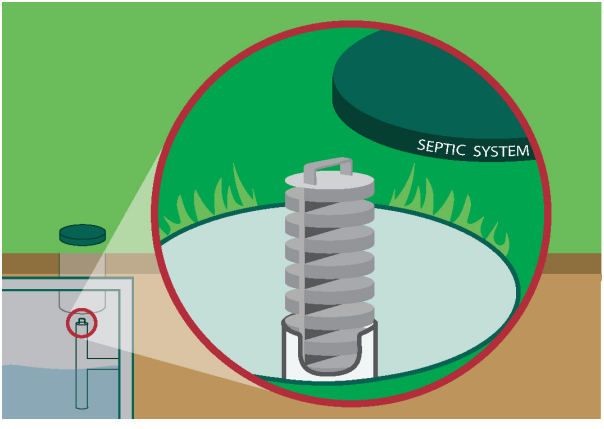
Maintain Your Drainfield/Sprayfield

- Never park or drive on your drainfield/sprayfield to ensure that it continues to function properly.
- Establish a healthy grass cover around your drainfield/sprayfield to help uptake moisture and nutrients, remove contaminants and stabilize soil.
- Plant trees and other woody vegetation far enough away from your tanks and drainfield/sprayfield to keep roots from growing into your septic system.
- Divert rainwater away from your tanks and drainfield/sprayfield to keep the soil surrounding the system from becoming too saturated and not allowing water to properly flow out of it.



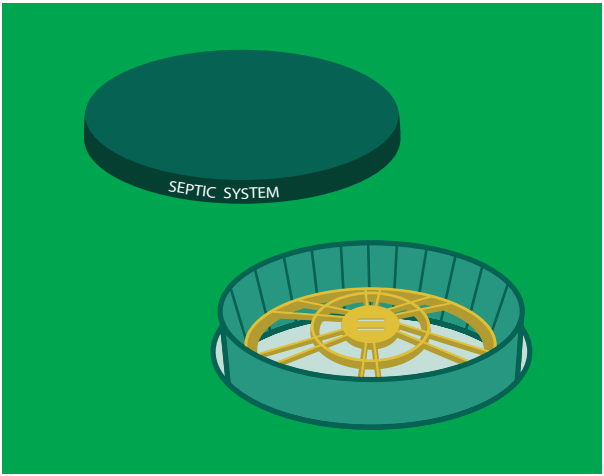
Clean Effluent Screens

- Conventional septic systems have effluent screens installed at the septic tank outlet to protect the drainfield by preventing solids from leaving the tank.
- Wash these screens directly over the inlet compartment of the septic tank every 1-2 years.



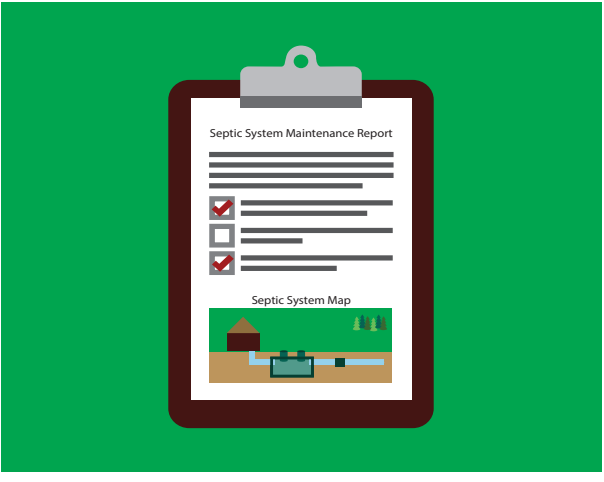
Tank Accessibility

- Having a readily accessible septic tank lid will make performing maintenance easier.
- Adding a septic tank riser can make locating, inspecting and pumping your septic tank more convenient.
- Lids and risers must be properly secured to prevent unwanted access by children and animals.
- Your septic tank access ports should be free of encroachment.



Keep Detailed Maintenance Records

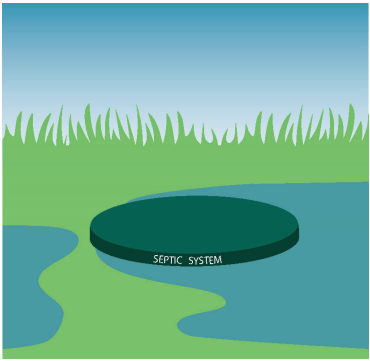
- It is important to keep detailed records of your septic system to help track scheduled and unscheduled maintenance (see pages 17-18).
- Having a sketch of where your system is located can also save you time and money during service visits.



Is Your Septic System Failing?

When septic systems begin to fail, not only do they not function properly, but they can damage your property and are costly to replace. The key is to catch the warning signs early on.

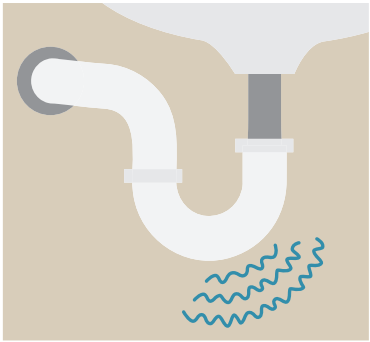
Signs of a failing septic system:



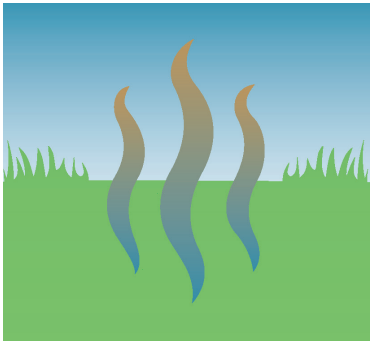
Standing water or damp spots near your septic tank or drainfield/sprayfield

Water and sewage from toilets, drains and sinks are backing up into your home

Your bathtubs, showers and sinks are draining slowly



Gurgling sounds in your plumbing system



Bad odors around your septic tank or drainfield/sprayfield

What to Avoid

Using cleaning products on toilets, sinks or baths that kill bacteria

- Look at the warning label: “caution” means the product will have little effect; “warning” means limited use; and “danger” means the chemical will kill the bacteria

Using septic system additives

- Many have not been proven to be beneficial to system performance
- Can resuspend particles that are settled at the bottom, potentially harming the drainfield/sprayfield

Pouring excessive fats, oils and grease down the drain

- Be mindful to limit the amount of fats, oils and grease going down the drain
- Fats separate in water resulting in excessive scum accumulation but will not kill wastewater system bacteria
- Oils have trouble separating in water but will not kill wastewater system bacteria
- Moisturizes, bath oils and solid material on pans are examples of grease; petroleum-based products may kill wastewater system bacteria

Using garbage disposals

- Pumping is required 1-2 years sooner
- Organic matter has not been digested, so it will take longer to break down

Pouring paints, solvents and unused medicine down the drain

- Can kill bacteria living in the system
- Increases maintenance due to fewer bacteria breaking down solids

Doing multiple loads of laundry a day

- Causes mixing of layers (see pages 2-5) and hydraulic overloading in the settling chamber, disrupting proper system function and damaging system components
- Avoid over-using bleach and detergents by following the instructions on product labels

Flushing excessive or treated toilet paper down the drain

- Causes faster sludge build up
- Toilet paper containing moisturizers may result in excessive scum accumulation

Flushing wet wipes

- May accumulate in the tank as scum or sludge
- Wet wipes do not break up in a septic system; flushing them can lead to blockages that cause sewage overflow

For more general septic system information visit:

ossf.tamu.edu
or
www.tceq.texas.gov/assistance/water/fyiossfs.html

For septic system permitting information visit:

www.tceq.texas.gov/permitting/ossf

To contact your local representative for septic system questions visit:

www6.tceq.texas.gov/oars/index.cfm?fuseaction=search.county

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Septic System Maintenance Record

Permit Number: _____ TMS Number: _____

Issued To: _____ Date Issued: _____

Address: _____

System Description: _____

Drainfield Type: _____

Septic Tank Size (gallons): _____

Pump Tank Size (gallons): _____

Drainfield Dimensions: _____

Number of Trenches: _____ Trench Length: _____

Septic System Installer:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Date System Installed: _____

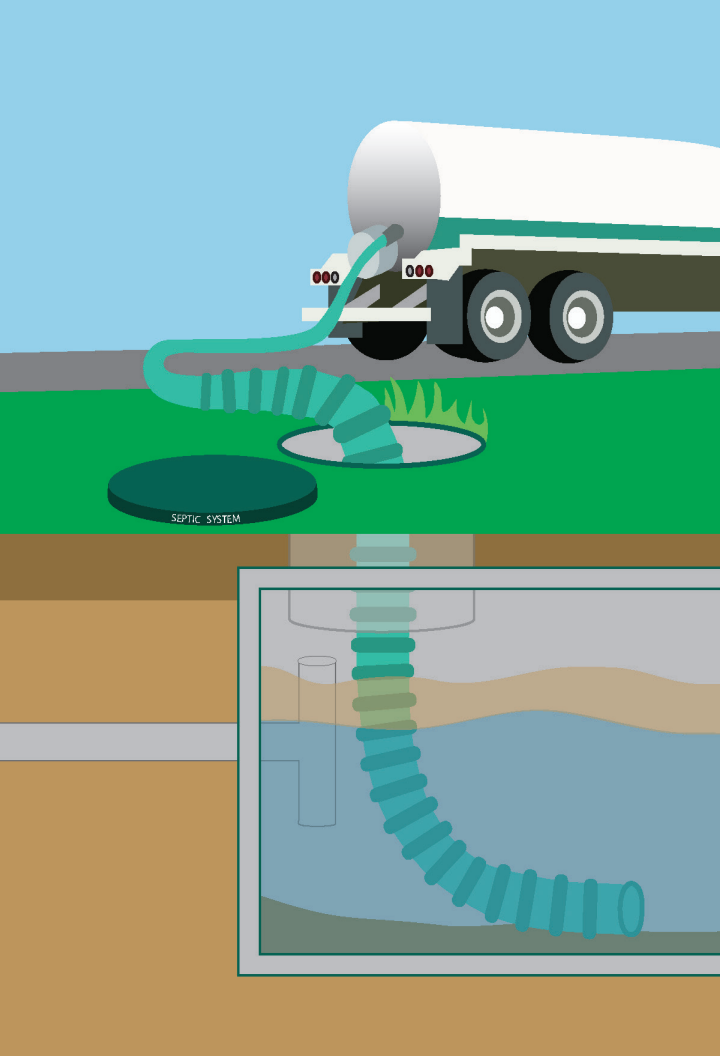
Septic System Pumper:

Name: _____

Address:_____

Telephone: _____

System Maintenance	
Date	
Work Description	
Cost	
Next Service Date	
Comments	


SEPTIC SYSTEM