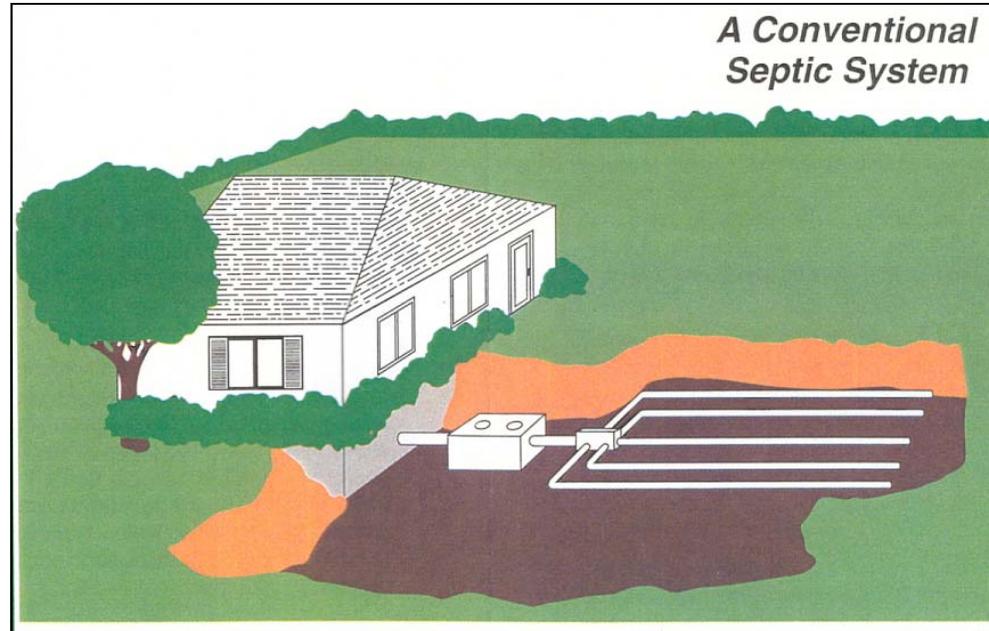


Caring for Your Septic System

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 unavailable.

There are many types of septic systems in use today. While all septic systems are individually designed for each site, most septic systems are based on the same principles.



A **septic system** consists of a **septic tank**, and a **drainfield**, all connected by pipes, called **lateral lines**.

Your septic 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 **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.

After the partially treated wastewater leaves the tank, it flows into a **distribution box or sanitary 'T'**, which separates this flow evenly into a network of **drainfield trenches**. Drainage holes at the bottom of each line allow the wastewater to drain into gravel trenches for temporary storage. This **effluent** then slowly seeps into the subsurface soil where it is further treated (**secondary treatment**).

Information in this brochure is provided by the EPA.
www.epa.gov

A Reference Guide

Your Septic System

for Homeowners



Bannock County Office
1901 Alvin Ricken Drive
Pocatello, Id 83201
(208) 233-9080

Caribou County Office
55 East 1st South
Soda Springs, Id 83276
(208) 547-4375

Bear Lake County Office
455 Washington #2
Montpelier, Id 83254
(208) 847-3000

Franklin County Office
42 West First South
Preston, Id 83263
(208) 852-0478

Bingham County Office
412 West Pacific
Blackfoot, Id 83221
(208) 785-2160

Oneida County Office
175 South 300 East
Malad, Id 83252
(208) 766-4764

Butte County Office
178 Sunset, PO Box 806
Arco, Id 83213
(208) 527-3463

Power County Office
590 1/2 Gifford
American Falls, Id 83211
(208) 226-5096

Healthy People in Healthy Communities

Caring for Your Septic System

The accumulated solids in the bottom of the septic tank should be pumped out **every three years** to prolong the life of your system. Septic systems must be maintained regularly to continue working.

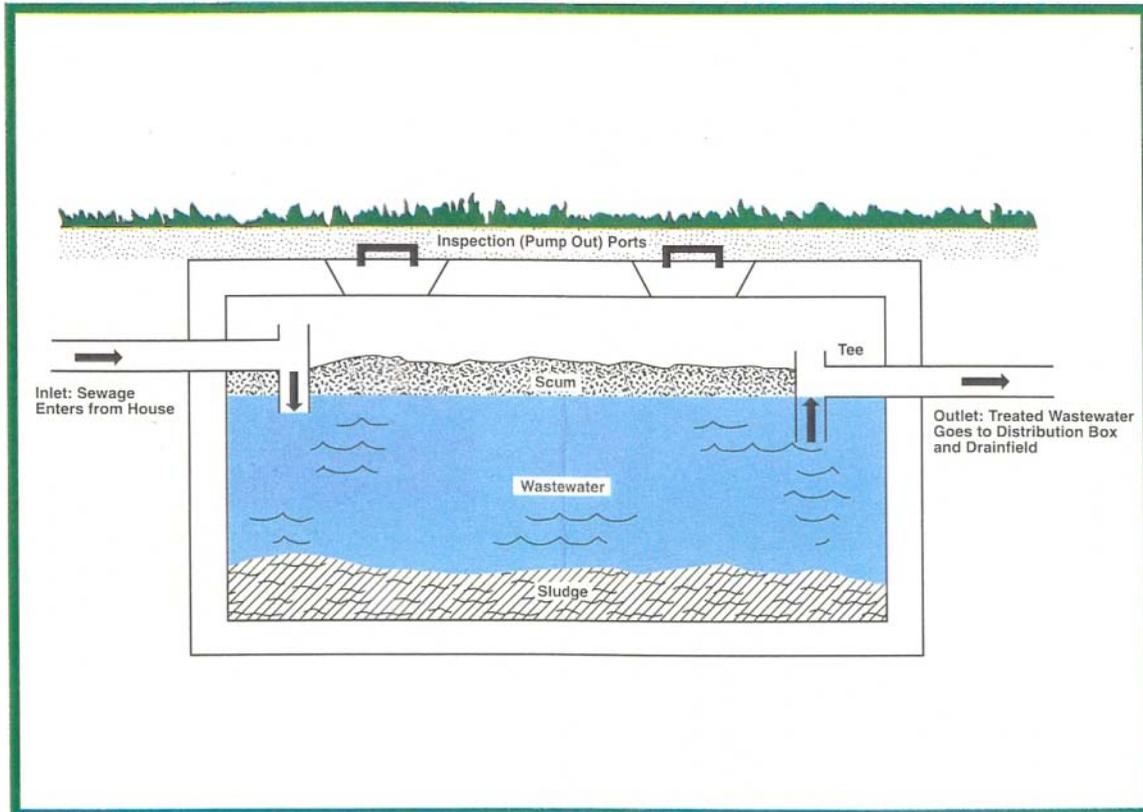
Neglect or abuse of your septic system can cause it to fail. Failing septic systems can

- Cause a serious health threat to your family and neighbors,
- Degrade the environment, especially lakes, streams and groundwater,
- Reduce the value of your property,
- Be very expensive to repair, and

- Put thousands of water supply users at risk if you live in a public water supply watershed and fail to maintain your system.

Be alert to these warning signs of a failing system:

- Sewage surfacing over the drainfield (especially after storms),
- Sewage back-ups in the house,
- Lush, green growth over the drainfield,
- Slow draining toilets or drains,
- Sewage odors.



Tips to Avoid Trouble

- **DO** have your tank pumped out and system inspected ever 3 years by a licensed septic contractor (listed in the yellow pages).
- **DO** keep a record of pumping, inspections, and other maintenance.
- **DO** practice water conservation. Repair dripping faucets and leaking toilets, run washing machines and dishwashers only when full, avoid long showers, and use water-saving features in faucets, shower heads and toilets.
- **DO** learn the location of your septic system and drainfield. Keep a sketch of it handy for service visits. If your system has a flow diversion valve, learn its location, and turn it once a year. Flow diverters can add many years to the life of your system.
- **DO** divert roof drains and surface water from driveways and hillsides away from the septic system. Keep sump pumps and house footing drains away from the septic system as well.
- **DO** take leftover hazardous household chemicals to your approved hazardous waste collection center for disposal. Use bleach, disinfectants, and drain and toilet bowl cleaners sparingly and in accordance with product labels.
- **DON'T** allow anyone to drive or park over any part of the system. The area over the

drainfield should be left undisturbed with only a mowed grass cover. Roots from nearby trees or shrubs may clog and damage your drain lines.

- **DON'T** make or allow repairs to your septic system without obtaining the required health department permit. Use licensed septic contractors to make repairs.
- **DON'T** use commercial septic tank additives. These products usually do not help and some may hurt your system in the long run.
- **DON'T** use your toilet as a trash can by dumping nondegradables down your toilet or drains. Also, don't poison septic system and the groundwater by pouring harmful chemicals down the drain. They can kill the beneficial bacteria that treat your wastewater. Keep the following materials out of your septic system:

