

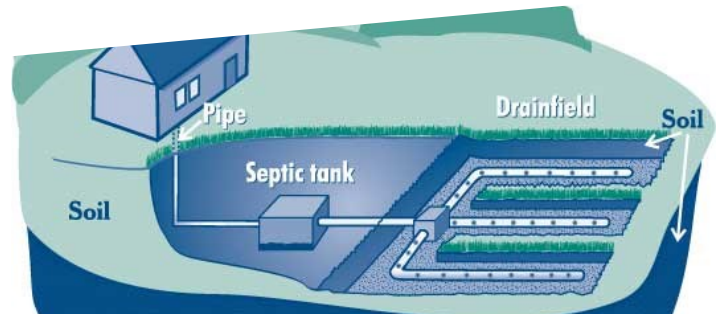
Septic Systems



What's the Difference Between Septic and Sewer?

Municipal sewer systems collect wastewater from multiple properties and pipe the wastewater to a large wastewater treatment plant.

A septic system treats and disposes household wastewater on site. Soil waste will eventually build up and need to be pumped from the septic tank while liquids flow through the outlet onto the leach field. When the leach field is properly functioning, any contaminants in the liquid are bound to soil, diluted, filtered out, or die off.



Inspections

Request a system inspection every time you have your septic tank pumped. Inspections are helpful at finding blockages, structural damage, and preparing for future issues so you have time to fix them. **System inspections are a few hundred preventative dollars, whereas system replacements or repairs can be several thousands to tens of thousands of dollars!**



Septic Malfunctions

Malfunctioning septic systems can cause local surface and groundwater pollution issues, most commonly caused by excess fecal bacteria, nitrogen, and phosphorus that the soil cannot absorb. Tree and shrub roots over a septic system can break or block pipes and interfere with the leach field.

Malfunction can look like slow running drains and toilets, standing water over your septic system, bad odors near the system, lush grass over the system during dry weather, and high algal growth in front of your property but not your neighbors'.

If your system is malfunctioning, reduce your water use, call to have your tank pumped, keep people and pets out of any seeping water in your yard, and look for a certified septic installer to repair or replace your system.

Future Planning

Even well-maintained septic systems will likely need to be replaced every 30 years. Keep records of when your system is inspected, pumped, and replaced.

Maine Certified Installers

Maine Department of Health and Human Services certifies septic installers. Call (207) 287-2070 or email subsurface.wastewater@maine.gov for more information.



Maintenance

Because septic systems are private, the property owner is responsible for all maintenance. Renters and guests are responsible for the proper use of the system. With proper maintenance, septic tanks can last over 30 years between replacements!

- Pump the tank every 2 to 3 years for year-round usage, 4 to 5 years for seasonal usage.
- Mark the septic system area to prevent vehicle traffic that can crush the system. Avoid plowing or piling snow on your septic and leach field.
- Don't flush anything other than toilet paper and your waste! Tissues, paper towels, wipes (even "flushable" ones), and other items can block your pipes and septic tank, causing your sewage to back up into your house.
- Compost food scraps instead of using a garbage disposal and pour excess cooking grease into a grease can before washing dishes.
- Use a plunger or mechanical snake to fix clogged drains.

- Use nontoxic cleaning products for sinks, showers, tubs, and other drains. Don't flush medicine or other products labeled "antibacterial". These products can harm the helpful bacteria breaking down the waste in your septic.
- Direct stormwater runoff away from your leach field using rain barrels, rain gardens, or roof dripline trenches.
- Plant grass or small groundcover plants over the septic tank and leach field so the roots don't clog the pipes. Larger perennials and shrubs should be planted on the downhill side of your leach field at least 20' away to help filter out contaminants before they reach a waterbody.



- Conserve water with low-flow faucets, dishwashers, washing machines, and other water-saving devices and spread out your laundry loads to avoid flushing your system.

For more information on septic system ownership, maintenance, and inspections, visit www.epa.gov/septic.