

How a Septic System Works and the Names of Its Parts:

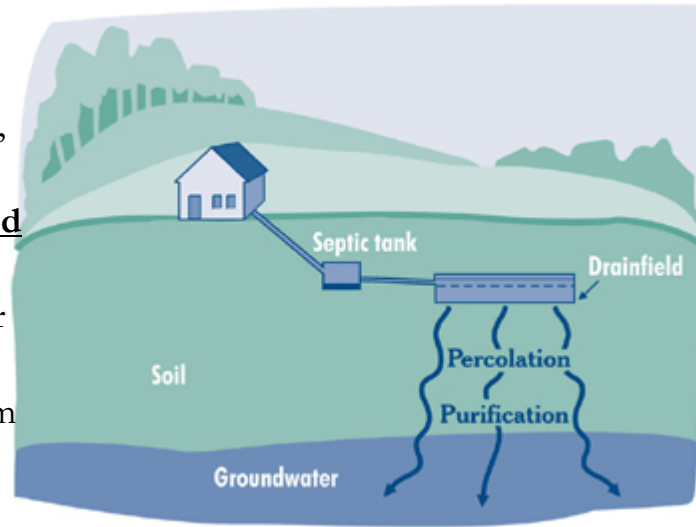
WARNING

Signs that your septic system may have problems and is in need of repair:

1. "Rotten egg" odor inside or outside the house.
2. Sewage backing up into the toilets, bathtubs or floor drains.
3. Sewage coming up through the ground at the drainfield or septic tank.

A Wastewater (also called sewage) comes from your toilet, kitchen, bath, laundry,

E Water for drinking, bathing and cleaning is pumped into your house from ground water through a well. It can also come from a body of surface water or a public water system.



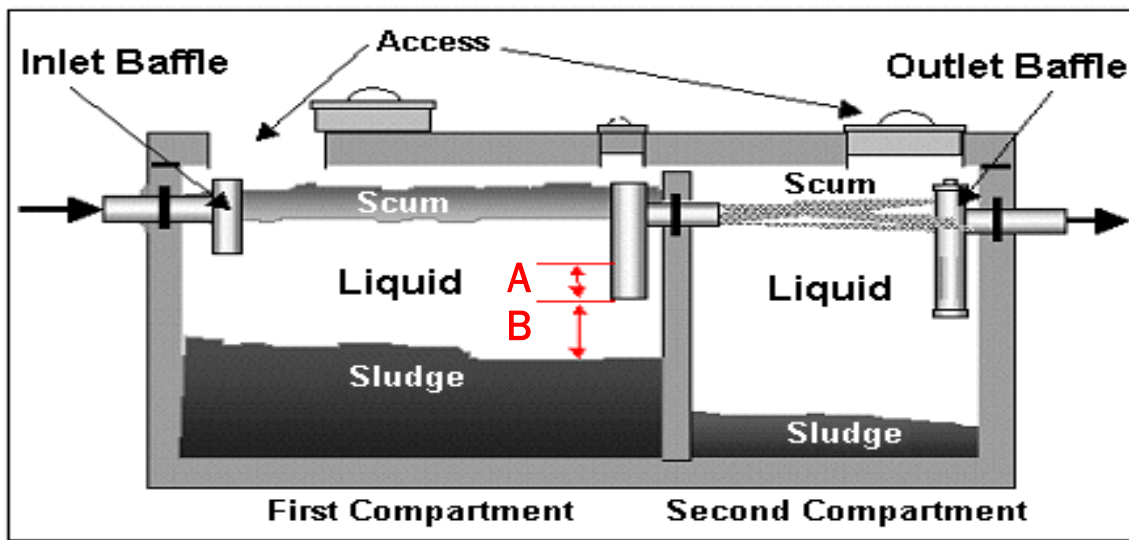
B The wastewater enters the septic tank and separates into three layers. The scum settles at the top of the wastewater. It is made up of mostly fats and grease. The heavy solids settle to the bottom and are called sludge. Eventually, the

effluent (the remaining wastewater) flows out to the drainfield.

C The pipes in the drainfield have holes in them. The effluent flows through the holes of the pipes into a layer of gravel.

D The effluent slowly flows through the gravel then down into the ground. The soil filters the effluent, chemically and biologically treating the effluent before it reaches groundwater.

Enlarged View of the Septic Tank



PUMP TANK WHEN "A" IS 3" OR LESS AND "B" IS 12" OR LESS

7 WAYS TO SAVE THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS IN SEPTIC SYSTEM REPAIRS

1. Conserve water.
2. Keep a record of any repairs and inspections with the septic system's permit and design.
3. Have the system evaluated at least once a year if your system has a pump or once every three years for gravity systems.
4. Don't put your chemicals into the septic system.
5. Don't let run-off water from roofs, driveways or patios flow toward the septic system.
6. Keep cows and horses, cars, buildings, driveways or heavy equipment away from the septic system.
7. Plant grass, not trees, over the septic system's drainfield.

**Whatcom County Health Department
On-Site Sewage System
Operation & Maintenance Program**

509 Girard Street
Bellingham, WA 98225
(360) 676-6724
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Taking the Steps Below Can:

1 *Conserve Water:*

Putting more water into your system than the ground can absorb is the most common reason for septic system failure.

- ⇒ Use water-saving showerheads, toilets and faucets. Take shorter showers or baths with half-filled tubs.
- ⇒ Repair dripping faucets and leaking toilets.
- ⇒ Wash only full loads of dishes and clothes. Run washers one at a time. Spread laundry out through the week.

2 *Keep a record of any repairs and inspections with the septic system's permit and design.*

Knowing where your septic system is and its past problems can protect it from damage and help repairs.

3 *Have the septic system evaluated at least once year if your system has a pump or once every three years for a gravity system.*

Prevention saves money! Don't wait until you develop a costly problem.

Evaluations are required by Whatcom County Code (WCC) 24.05.160. Contact a licensed professional to perform an evaluation. Evaluations may address the following operation and maintenance issues:

- ⇒ Check the sludge and scum levels to see if the septic tank needs pumping.
- ⇒ Check to make sure the baffles are not broken.
- ⇒ Add inspection pipes to the drainfield to aid in monitoring inspections. If sewage is pooling in the pipes, there may be a problem.
- ⇒ Add risers to your septic tank lids to make future inspections quick and easy.
- ⇒ Add an outlet filter, if you don't have one, to help protect your drainfield. Clean the filter annually or as needed.

4 *Don't put chemicals or harmful solids into the septic system.*

Chemicals hurt the septic system and pollute ground water. Harmful solids will fill up the septic tank faster.

- ⇒ Avoid putting these harmful chemicals into the septic system: oils, paints or paint thinners, floor cleaners, pesticides, drain cleaners, grease, cooking oils.
- ⇒ Avoid putting these harmful solids into the septic system: newspaper, paper towels, rags, coffee grounds, sanitary napkins, tampons, condoms, kitty litter,

cigarettes or diapers.

- ⇒ Avoid using a garbage disposal. It adds grease and food solids to the septic system.
- ⇒ Septic system additives are not necessary and can harm the septic system.
- ⇒ Get rid of chemicals in a safe way. Call the Whatcom County Recycling Hotline at (360) 676-5723 or Disposal of Toxics at (360) 380-4640.

5 *Don't let run-off water from roofs, driveways or patios flow toward the septic system.*

Run-off water puts an extra load on the drainfield. If the soil is saturated it can't soak up more water.

6 *Keep cows and horses, cars, buildings, driveways or heavy equipment away from the septic system.*

Extra weight can break the pipes. Buildings and driveways prevent access for pumping and maintenance.

7 *Plant grass, not trees, over the septic system's drainfield.*

Tree roots may plug the drainfield.

Call the Whatcom County Health Department for information on taking care of your septic system and help solving problems.

Call us at (360) 676-6724 or visit us at 509 Girard Street, Bellingham, WA from 8:30am to 4:30pm, Monday through Friday.

- ⇒ We can give you a list of licensed Operations & Maintenance Specialists, Designers, Installers and Pumpers in Whatcom County.
- ⇒ We may have a copy of your septic permit, design and maintenance records.
- ⇒ We have copies of County and State sewage regulations and guidelines.
- ⇒ We can identify or help solve problems.

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HEALTHIER WASHINGTON

Check our website for more information on septic systems and other public health information:

www.whatcomcounty.us/health