

This system was last cleaned on: \_\_\_\_\_  
(date)

By: \_\_\_\_\_

### Record of Maintenance

Date	Work Done	Contractor
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# HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE TO SEPTIC SYSTEMS

Maintaining your septic system can help avoid premature, inconvenient and costly failures. This guide will give homeowners an introduction to the information they need to make intelligent decisions.

*Compliments of:*



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*In cooperation with:*

CT Department of Public Health

Environmental Engineering Program

CT Department of Environmental Protection

CT Environmental Health Association

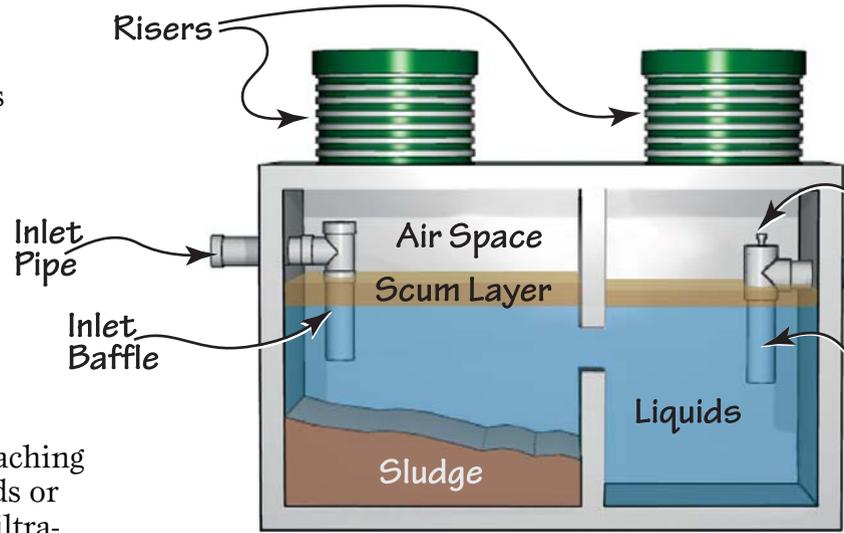
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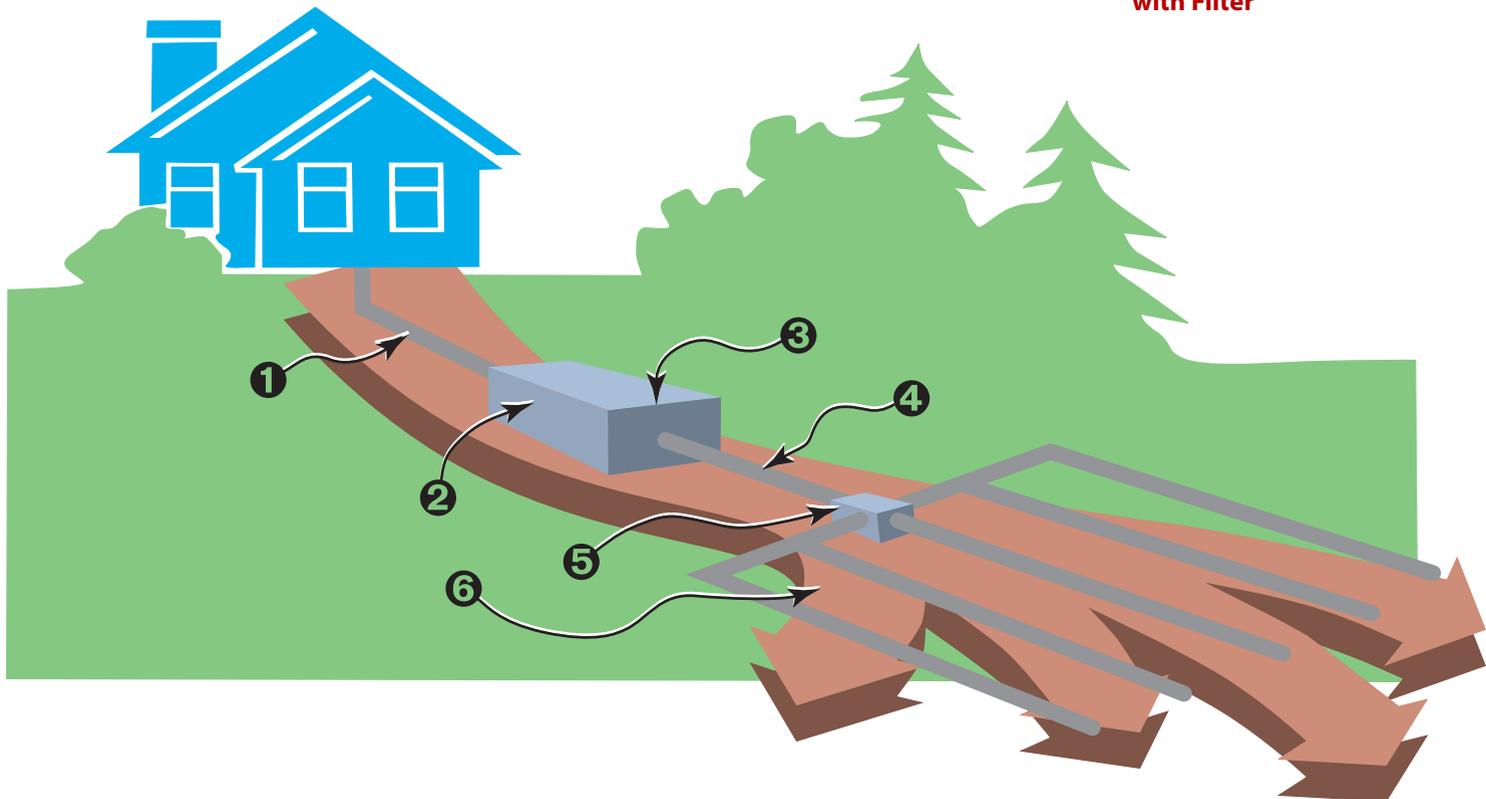
# How a Septic System works

## There are six major components:

- 1.) a house sewer line carries waste to the septic tank
- 2.) a septic tank that allows the solids to settle and remain in the tank while the liquids flow into the leaching system
- 3.) as of 2000, all septic tanks have been constructed with outlet baffle filters. The filters must be cleaned at the time of septic tank pumping. Filters may require more repeat cleaning if they clog frequently.
- 4.) distribution piping which leads effluent from the tank
- 5.) a liquid distribution box may be used to uniformly distribute effluent through the leaching system
- 6.) a leaching system which may consist of a leaching field, trenches, leaching pits (dry wells), beds or galleries which help purify the effluent by filtration through the soil.



**Two-Compartment Tank with Filter**

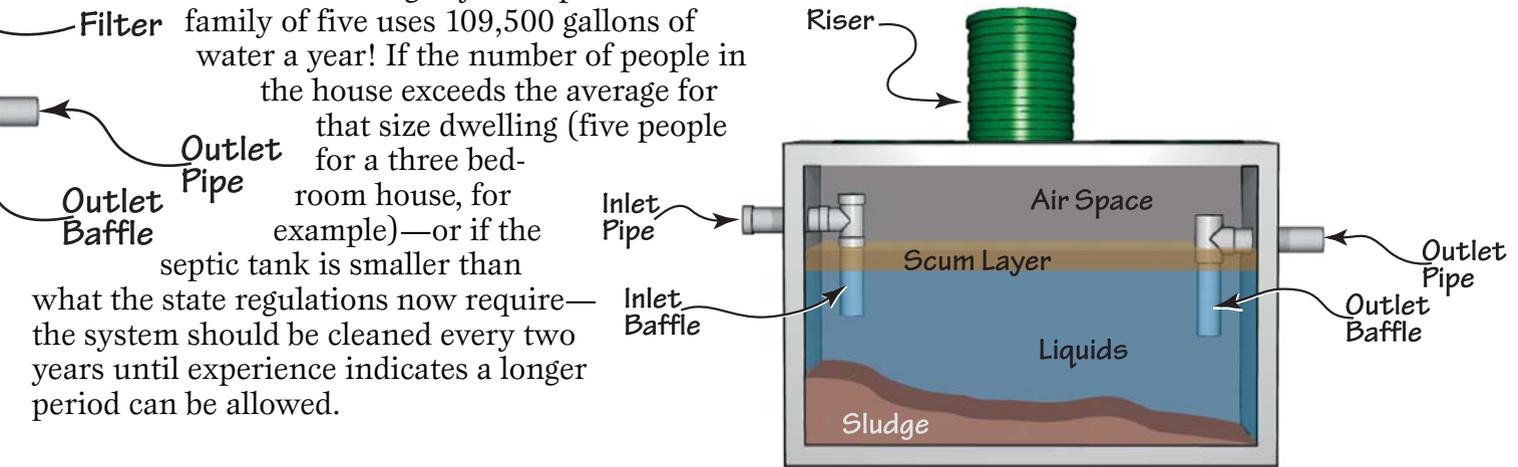


# How often should the Septic Tank be cleaned?

Septic tanks should be checked and cleaned regularly. However, if you have a large family, an older septic system or a food disposal, more frequent cleaning of the tank is advisable. Every two to three years is an average interval. Solids, which settle down to the bottom of the tank, are broken down by bacterial action. Eventually, the remaining undigested material, known as “sludge,” accumulates and must be removed. If solids are not pumped out regularly, they will build up to a high level and can be carried from the tank to the absorption field. Those solids will clog the pipes, stone and the soil surrounding them. For over the last 30 years, Connecticut Public Health Code regulations require that new septic tanks have a minimum capacity of 1,000 gallons and 1,250 gallons if a garbage disposal is installed. 1,250–1,500 gallon tanks are common for a four to five bedroom house. At a use rate of 60 gallons per person/per day—

considered average by most plumbers—a family of five uses 109,500 gallons of water a year! If the number of people in the house exceeds the average for that size dwelling (five people for a three bedroom house, for example)—or if the septic tank is smaller than

what the state regulations now require—the system should be cleaned every two years until experience indicates a longer period can be allowed.



Single-Compartment Tank

## Common causes of malfunction that can lead to failure

- Neglecting to inspect and clean the septic tank regularly
- Lack of understanding on the proper use of the system
- Poor soil conditions and/or system design or installation

Some signs of failure: sewage odor, sewage discharging to the ground, wet or muddy patches in your lawn, lush green grass, slow draining bathroom or kitchen fixtures, back up of sewage into your house. Sewage running back from your leaching field into your tank at time of cleaning is a sign of malfunction.

Often, most problems can be prevented by simple maintenance. A regular cleaning costs relatively little and can help prevent system failures. If a system failure does occur, it is best to contact the town sanitarian or health officer for instructions as pumping and cleaning alone may not cure the problem.

A failure could require replacing the entire system, which can cost thousands depending on site conditions... to say nothing of the cost of replanting a yard after a system has been dug up or the inconvenience of trying to live in a house without a working septic system.

Homeowners should verify that a cleaner/installer is licensed, and comes well recommended. While there are many state licensed contractors, the name of the contractor that appears in this pamphlet can offer you advice and up-to-date information. These contractors are members of COWRA, an association dedicated to the encouragement of the highest standards of professional performance and integrity. Through COWRA's continuing education program, members are kept current on state-of-the-art methods and, where needed, innovative approaches to subsurface disposal systems.

## Tips to Avoid Trouble

**Do** check with the Town Sanitarian or Director of Health for documented information concerning a house's septic system. If no records are available on a particular house, check with several local cleaner/installer firms, and perhaps you can locate the one that worked on the original installation.

**Do** have your tank pumped out, effluent filter cleaned and system inspected on a regular basis by a licensed septic contractor and who is a member of COWRA.

**Do** install a riser. State code requires that cleanout covers must be within 12" of the ground's surface. By code, cleanout covers in excess of 12" deep must have a riser installed at the time of service.

**Do** set up and adhere to a sound system of inspection and cleaning.

**Do** educate your family in the proper use of the system within these guidelines.

**Do** leave the area over the drain field undisturbed with only a mowed grass cover. Roots from nearby trees or shrubs may clog and damage your drain lines.

**Do** practice water conservation. Check plumbing for leaking fixtures, i.e. toilets, tubs, showers or sinks. A steady leak or drip can overload a drainage system. Run dishwashers and washing machines only when full. Purchase water saving appliances and install water saving features in faucets, toilets and showerheads.

**Do** take household chemicals to an approved hazardous waste collection carrier for disposal.

**Do** keep a file of the dates of cleaning the system in the permanent house file, so this information can be passed on to the next owner. You can use the back page of this brochure to record any repair and all maintenance information.

**Do** divert roof drains and surface water from driveways and hills away from the septic system. Sump pumps and house footing drains should direct away from the septic system as well.

**Do** learn the location of your septic system and drain field. Keep a sketch handy for service visits.

**Don't** allow anyone to drive or park over any part of the septic system.

**Don't** allow excess amounts of fat or grease to enter the system—it can congeal and cause obstructions. If you are in the habit of using a kitchen sink's garbage disposal, plan to have your tank pumped more frequently to clear food solids in the system.

**Don't** use retail chemical compounds or enzymes to substitute for routine septic tank cleaning—there is no such thing as a quick fix.

**Don't** use large amounts of laundry soaps, detergents, bleaches, drain cleaners—recommended quantities in accordance with product labels should not adversely affect the system.

**Don't** discharge the backwash solution from water softeners into subsurface sewage systems. Connecticut Department of Public Health regulations prohibit this.

**Don't** flush down paper towels, wipes or other heavy matter. Don't use your toilet or drains as a trash can by dumping or pouring non-degradables.

**Don't** poison the septic system and the groundwater with harmful chemicals that can kill the beneficial bacteria that treat your wastewater.

**Keep the following materials out of your septic system:**

### **POISONS:**

**gasoline, oil, paint, paint thinner, pesticides, antifreeze**

### **NON-DEGRADABLES:**

**grease, plastics, disposable diapers, etc.**