

For your interest

Neglect of your wastewater treatment system can cause serious health threats from viruses and bacteria. Contamination of wells, pollution of lakes and streams and reduction of your property values are other consequences.

Well water supplies should be tested for purity annually, or more often if contamination threats occur. Flooding, toxic spills, wastewater system malfunctioning or breaching of the well cap are among indications of the need for testing.

If your wastewater system is faulty, test your well water supplies immediately.

Using a garbage disposal can double the amount of solids entering a septic tank and will increase the frequency of pumping.

Conserve water, check for leaks, direct surface water and downspouts away from your septic system. Sump pumps should not be connected to the septic system.

Hydraulic overloading is the most common cause of wastewater treatment system failure.

No one would buy an expensive car and never change the oil. Yet, people sometimes buy homes with expensive wastewater treatment systems and give little thought to the maintenance needed. Pumping the septic tank is a small expense compared to replacement of the system – and usually small compared to municipal sewer taxes!

You may have noticed....

This brochure and water professionals refer to wastewater systems as TREATMENT systems, not disposal systems.

That is because the wastewater re-enters the water cycle, infiltrating through the ground. It will become part of the groundwater aquifer or enter surface water courses at some point.

Treatment of wastewater is essential to keeping aquifers recharged with clean water.

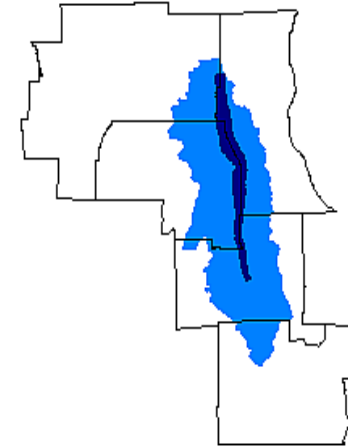
Formerly, it was believed that gray-water systems could safely dispose of shower, sink and laundry water. However, testing by NYS Department of Health, EPA and other agencies has revealed that gray-water carries a similar bacterial load to toilet water. All wastewater needs to be treated before release into the soil or environment.



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MANAGING YOUR ON-SITE WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEM



SLAP-5

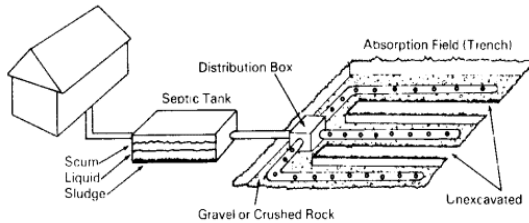
**Seneca Lake
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OUT OF SIGHT, NOT OUT OF MIND

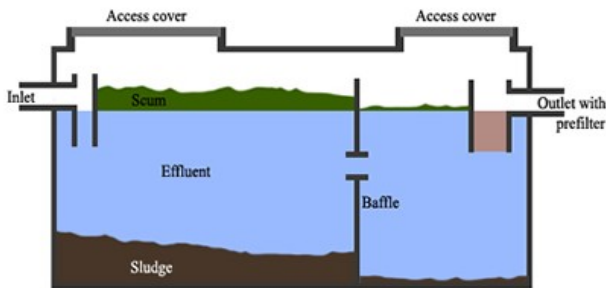
Your on-site wastewater treatment system, (commonly called a septic system) needs regular care and maintenance.

With proper care, a wastewater treatment system should last approximately 25-30 years and should safeguard your health and the environment.

Components of an on-site wastewater treatment system are shown in the diagrams. Each component must function for effective treatment to occur.



The **SEPTIC TANK** receives wastewater from the house and allows solids to settle to the bottom of the tank. Oils and grease rise to the top of the tank, creating a scum layer. **BAFFLES** in the tank decrease the turbulence of water entry and prevent solids and scum from leaving the tank.



Wastewater leaving the tank flows through an **OUTLET FILTER** to a **DISTRIBUTION BOX**. This box allows the effluent to flow evenly into several **PERFORATED PIPES** that disperse effluent into the soil. The Soil area is called an **ABSORPTION FIELD** (also commonly called a leach field).

SOIL is a vital part of the system. Oxygen-breathing bacteria in the soil consume viruses and bacteria that would contaminate groundwater. Nutrients – nitrogen and phosphorus are still present in the effluent.



MAINTENANCE IS NECESSARY

Septic tanks should be pumped every 3-5 years. Although a fraction of the solids will be digested by anaerobic bacteria in the tank, some solids and scum will never digest and must be removed to retain capacity to receive water.

ADDITIVES DO NOT REDUCE THE NEED FOR PUMPING. Also, products advertised to dissolve the scum layer will send oil and grease into the soil, greatly diminishing absorption rates.

Pipes and baffles should be checked at the time of pumping. The distribution box should be opened to ensure that it is level and to check for evidence of solids leaving the tank.

Absorption fields should be examined for signs of failure – surface water, spongy soil, sewage odors, too-lush vegetation.

PROTECT YOUR INVESTMENT

Never build, park, or pave over any part of the on-site wastewater treatment system.

Keep plants with large, invasive roots away from the system.

Mow the grass over the absorption field regularly to help take up nutrients.

Plant a buffer strip of grass, shrubs and trees between your absorption field and any pond, stream or lake to help remove nutrients before they enter surface water.

AEROBIC TREATMENT UNITS are often used instead of septic tanks where lots are small or in too close proximity to surface waters. These units should be serviced regularly by a certified manufacturer's representative.

Other sources of information include your local:

Code Enforcement Officer
Cornell Cooperative Extension
Department of Health
Soil and Water Conservation District
Watershed Inspector
Watershed Protection Agency