



## **Septic System Operation and Maintenance FAQ**

### **What is a septic system?**

A septic system is an on-site wastewater treatment system commonly used in homes that are not connected to a municipal sewer system. It typically consists of a septic tank and a drain field.

### **How does a septic system work?**

Wastewater from your home flows into the septic tank, where solids settle at the bottom, and liquids flow into the drain field for further treatment by soil. Bacteria in the tank break down the solids.

### **How often should I pump my septic tank?**

A septic tank is recommended to be pumped every 3-5 years, depending on the size of the tank and how many people live in the home. For personalized recommendations, consult a professional. If your system is accessible (tank lids available), we can provide a personalized recommendation during an evaluation.

### **Can I use additives in my septic system?**

It is recommended to avoid additives. They may disrupt the natural bacterial balance in the tank, affecting system performance.<sup>1</sup>

### **What should I avoid flushing into the system?**

Avoid flushing non-biodegradable items, grease, chemicals, and excessive amounts of household cleaners. Stick to toilet paper and human waste.

### **How can I conserve water to help my septic system?**

Fix leaks promptly, install water-saving appliances, and spread laundry loads throughout the week to reduce water usage on a single day.

### **What signs indicate a potential issue with my septic system?**

Warning signs include slow drains, foul odors, lush grass over the drain field, and gurgling sounds in plumbing fixtures. If you notice any, contact a professional.

### **Can I plant trees near my septic system?**

Trees should be planted away from all system components. This prevents roots from damaging the system. Consult a professional for proper planting distances.

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<sup>1</sup>Pradhan, S., Hoover, M. T., Clark, G. H., Gumpertz, M., Cobb, C., & Strock, J. (2011). Impacts of Biological Additives, Part 1: Solids Accumulation in Septic Tanks. *Journal of Environmental Health*, 74(5), 16–21. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26329322>



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### **How can I locate my septic tank and drain field?**

Keep a record of their locations, and if unsure, consult your system's design or hire a professional to locate them. Sometimes we will have records of installation permits or other information about the system on file. To request this information, please don't hesitate to contact us.

### **Why is operation and maintenance (O&M) important?**

Proper operation and maintenance help prevent system failures, protect the environment, and ensure the longevity of your septic system.

### **What is required of me from the O&M program?**

Upon receiving an application or renewal packet, complete the form to the best of your ability, and return it with the program fee within 30 days. Ensure your selected evaluation method is completed within one year. If you choose an evaluation by our department, we will contact you to schedule it, weather permitting.

### **What is the purpose of the \$50 fee?**

The fee helps to cover the cost of the program, including items such as postage, communication paperwork, educational materials, tools, equipment, and mileage

### **Who can complete the required maintenance?**

A courtesy listing of registered service providers can be found on our website. Any of the providers on this list may be used.

### **How will I know the proper maintenance required for my system?**

System specific recommendations will be specified on your permit and explained on the evaluation form when applicable

### **How much does it cost for the EHS to do the evaluation?**

There is no additional program fee for an evaluation conducted by our department.

### **Will I be required to update my system?**

The program is NOT intended to require replacement of old systems. If the system is not causing a public health nuisance, the system can remain in operation and be permitted.

### **What if I sell my property?**

The O&M permit will remain with the property where the system resides and will be transferred to the next homeowner, and they will be responsible for renewal.

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<sup>1</sup>Pradhan, S., Hoover, M. T., Clark, G. H., Gumpertz, M., Cobb, C., & Strock, J. (2011). Impacts of Biological Additives, Part 1: Solids Accumulation in Septic Tanks. *Journal of Environmental Health*, 74(5), 16–21. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26329322>