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If you are like most people, you know very little about your septic tank system. This is understandable in urban and suburban areas there are sewers to carry household waste to municipal wastewater treatment plants. In more rural areas, however, septic tank systems provide the functions of both sewers and treatment plants.

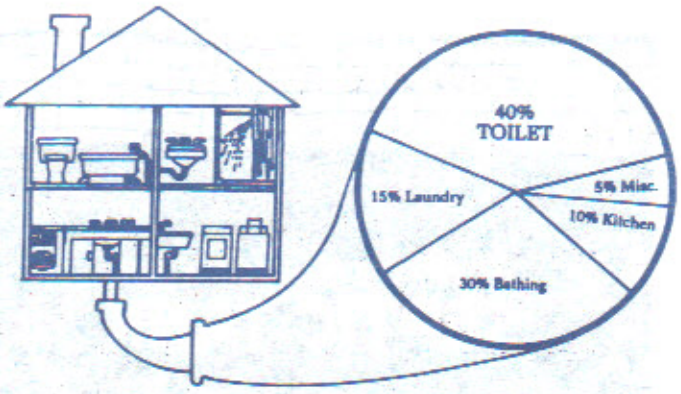
All household waste is disposed of through the septic system. The proper operation of the septic system is essential to health, property value, and the ecology. To see if you know enough about your septic system, answer the following questions. If you cannot answer all the questions, your septic system could become a huge aggravation, public nuisance, health hazard and financial burden.

- Do you know what a septic tank is and how it works?
- Do you know what kind of soil absorption area you have and how it works?
- Do you know what causes septic systems to fail?
- Do you know what it costs to replace a faulty septic system?
- Do you know that a faulty septic system creates health hazards and pollutes the ground water?

These are very serious questions. The health of your family and the value of your property rely heavily upon the answers to these questions.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" was never more true than it is with septic tank care. A small commitment to the care of your septic system will protect you indefinitely from the nightmare created by a failing system. This pamphlet will try to give you a fairly clear picture of how household waste is treated from drain to soil.

The quantity and composition of waste generated in the home varies according to the number of residents, their personal water usage, and the water-using appliances in the home.

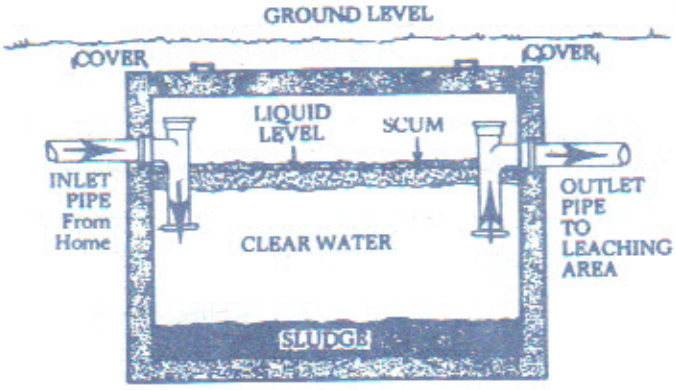


THE SEPTIC SYSTEM:

The septic system is a small, on-site sewage treatment and disposal system buried in the ground. The septic system is comprised of a septic tank and a soil absorption area.

The septic tank was patented in London around 1900. Websters' Dictionary defines the septic tank as "a tank in which waste matter is decomposed through bacterial action." The modern septic tank is a watertight box usually made of precast concrete, concrete blocks, or reinforced fiberglass. When household waste material enters this box, several things occur:

1. Organic solid material floats to the surface and forms a layer of what is commonly called "scum." Bacteria in the septic tank biologically convert this material to liquid.
2. Inorganic or inert solid materials and the by-products of bacterial digestion sink to the bottom of the tank and form a layer commonly called "sludge "
3. Only fairly clear water should exist between the scum and sludge layers. It is this clear water—and only this clear waterthat should overflow into the soil absorption area.



SEPTIC TANK

Solid material overflowing into the soil absorption area should be avoided at all costs. It is this solids overflow that clogs soil pores and causes septic systems to fail. Two main factors cause solid material to build up enough to overflow: Bacterial deficiency and lack of sludge removal.

Bacteria must be present in the septic tank to digest the organic solids. Normal household waste provides enough bacteria to digest the solid UNLESS any harm is done to the bacteria. Bacteria are very sensitive to environmental changes. Many home-care products used in most homes every day will destroy bacteria. Check the labels of products you normally use. Labels carrying any of the following warnings will kill bacteria.

- Harmful or fatal if swallowed
- Avoid contact with the skin
- Do not get in open cuts or sores
- If comes in contact with eyes, call a physician immediately

Check the following list. These are commonly used home-care products that will kill bacteria necessary for proper septic tank operation. Many of these products are used in most homes on a daily basis:

detergents	bleach	toilet cleaners
disinfectants	polishes	cleaning compounds
sink & tub cleaners	acids	caustic drain openers

People do not think of the effect of these products on the

septic system when the products go down the drain. What kind of effect do you think antiseptics have on your septic tank?

Bacteria must be present to digest and liquify the scum. If not digested, the scum will accumulate until it overflows, clogging the soil absorption area.

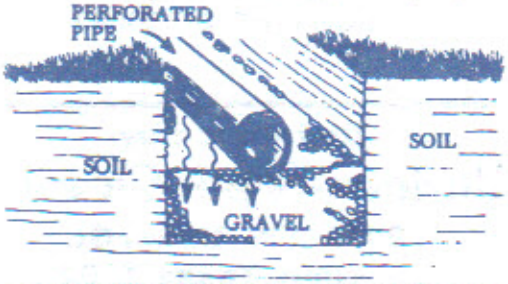
The sludge in the septic tank—inorganic and inert material and by products of bacterial digestion—is not biodegradable and will not decompose. If not removed, sludge will accumulate until it overflows, again clogging the soil absorption area.

CONTAMINATED TANK

SOIL ABSORPTION OR LEACHING AREA:

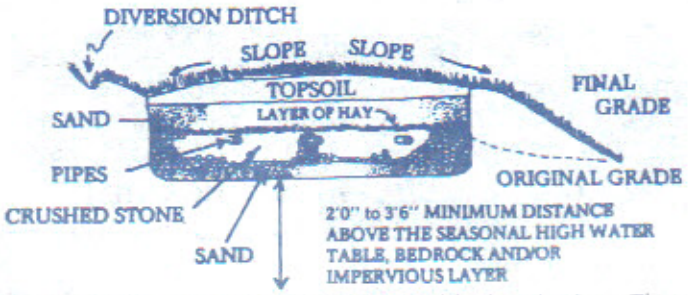
There are many kinds of soil absorption or leaching systems. There are too many to discuss them all. There are three main ways to carry off the overflow water from the septic tank: leaching fields, filter beds, and drainage pits (also called drywells or cesspools)

LEACHING FIELDS generally consist of a network of perforated pipes laid in a gravel-lined trench. Solids clogging the pipe perforations will cause drainage to slow and eventually stop.

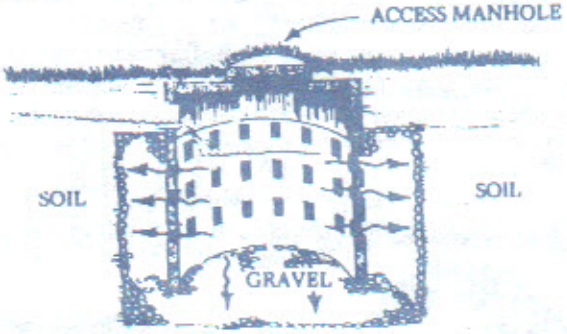


FILTER BEDS work on the same principle as leaching fields, with a perforated pipe running through layers of sand and crushed stone. Filter beds are wider than leaching fields, and can be constructed above or below ground.

Filter beds are much smaller than leaching fields and can be utilized where property is not large enough for the long trenches required for a leaching field. Solids clogging the perforated pipe or the sand will cause drainage to slow and eventually stop.



DRAINAGE PITS are precast or concrete block cylinders. They have closed tops, open bottoms, and holes in the sidewalls. Some older septic systems consist of only a drainage pit or cesspool.



SEPTIC SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

The U.S. Government Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Public Health Service says, "A septic tank system will serve a home satisfactorily only if it is properly designed, installed, and adequately maintained. Even a good system which does not have proper care and attention may become a nuisance, and burdensome expense."

Septic system maintenance means two simple things. First, sludge that accumulates in the bottom of the tank must be pumped out periodically. How frequently depends on the size of the tank, the use it gets, and the condition of the system. There is no additive that you can put in the tank that will deal with the sludge. IT MUST BE PUMPED OUT. If not pumped out, it will eventually overflow into the soil absorption area. This will clog the system, and it will need to be replaced, at enormous expense and inconvenience.

The second part of septic system maintenance involves the bacteria necessary for solids digestion. If bacteria-killing products are used in the home—as they usually are—the bacteria must be replenished. If the bacteria are not replenished, the septic system WILL fill up with solid material and overflow into the soil absorption area. This will clog the system and it will have to be replaced.

Your septic tank could be overflowing solid material into the soil RIGHT NOW, and you won't know it until it blocks the soil so badly that no more drainage is possible. This block-

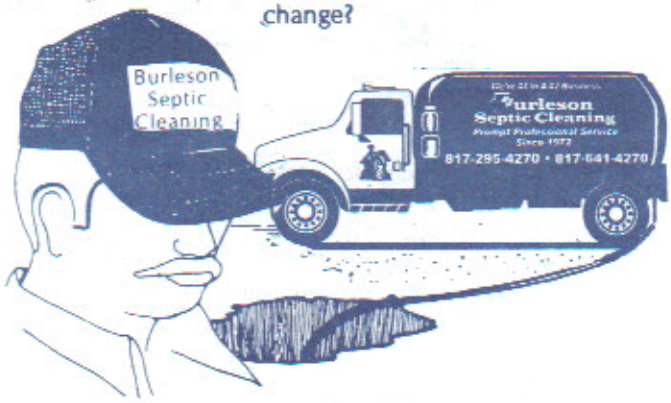
age takes varying periods of time depending on soil structure. But this is fact: a neglected system WILL get blocked; it WILL overflow; it WILL have an obnoxious odor; it WILL contaminate and pollute. It will probably have to be replaced. The first septic system "emergency" usually marks the beginning of the end. Replacement costs vary from $1,500 to $3,000 and up.

DO NOT NEGLECT YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM

A national survey shows that if you have your septic tank pumped out regularly, you will save 68% over a ten-year period. At the end of the ten years your system will be in like-new condition: healthy, free-flowing, odor-free, and ready to give you years and years more service.

If you neglect your system, at the end of the same ten-year period you will have a dead, failed system. You will then have to get a contractor to dig up your yard, remove the contaminated material and replace the system. You will also have to endure the aggravation of trucks and equipment in your yard and wait for your lawn to come back in.

Which makes more sense to you?
Would you drive your car 100,000 miles without an oil change?



SOME COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Q: What causes the thick crust in my septic tank?
A: The crusting is organic material that has congealed into a solid mass. This condition is dangerous and indicates a bacterial deficiency. Your tank needs pumping to avoid future problems.
Q: Will acid help my septic system?
A: Acids and chemicals work only temporarily. They are extremely dangerous to use and are harmful to the environment. The Environmental Protection Agency has already banned the use of these hazardous materials in many areas.
Q: What about yeast or baking soda?
A: Yeast merely provides a fermentation environment. It does not provide bacteria. Baking soda raises the pH in the tank. Again no bacteria provided, and raising the pH too much can actually harm the septic process.
Q: My system recently backed up for the first time in years. Why should I start maintaining it now?
A: A backup is the first sign of septic system failure. You will be lucky to go another six month

WARNING SIGNS OF SEPTIC SYSTEM FAILURE

- Sluggish drainage in the home
- Plumbing backups
- Gurgling sound in pipes and drains
- Outdoor odor
- Mushy ground or greener grass in area of septic system

OTHER CAUSES OF SEPTIC SYSTEM FAILURE

- Improper placement, in area of poor drainage
- Improper installation, not according to septic codes.
- Overloading—use water sparingly. Do only full loads of wash at off-peak times if possible.
- Do not put kitchen grease down the drain.
- Do not flush cigarette butts, sanitary napkins, or other inorganic materials down the toilet.
- Garbage disposals—ground up food stuffs are especially hard on the septic system because they are not digested first by the human body. Any septic system that receives garbage grindings needs the extra help of Enzymes to break down these solids.
- Water softeners—salts and chemicals will damage the septic tank. Channel washing machine and waste from the water softeners into separate disposal area if possible, such as a dry-wall.
- Tree roots clogging pipes—ask your septic contractor about this.

The septic system should never fail if designed and installed properly and if it is properly maintained. Neglected systems WILL FAIL. Septic system maintenance means periodic pumping, ask your contractor what intervals your system needs.

Isn't it time for you to start your maintenance program? The well-being of your family and your property value are at stake. Your family and your home are your most important possessions.

PROTECT THEM. . .
DON'T NEGLECT THEM !

Distributed by:
Burleson Septic Cleaning
2410 SW Hulen St.
Burleson, Texas 76028
(817) 295-4270
(817) 641-4270
Fax: (817) 295-4736