How can I protect my drain field?

- Plant only grass over and near your septic system. Roots from nearby trees or shrubs might clog and damage the drain field.
- Don't drive or park vehicles on any part of your septic system. Doing so can compact the soil in your drain field or damage the pipes, tank or other septic system components.
- Keep roof drains, basement sump pump drains and other rainwater or surface water drainage systems away from the drain field. Flooding the drain field with excessive water slows down or stops treatment processes and can cause plumbing fixtures to back up.

For more information, contact your local health department or visit **www.epa.gov/owm/septic/**.

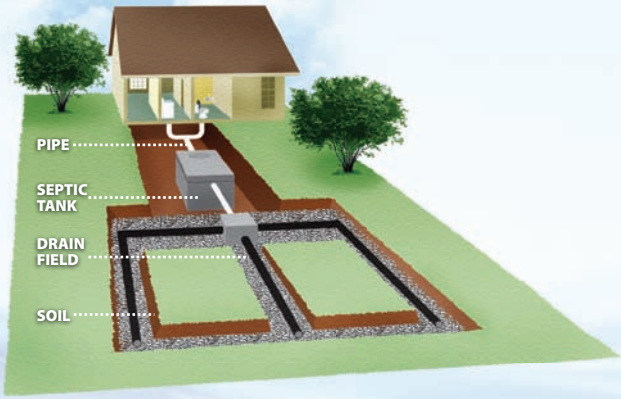
This information will be made available in accessible formats upon request. Please contact the Communications Department at (352) 796-7211 or 1-800-423-1476 (FL only), ext. 4757; TDD only at 1-800-231-6103 (FL only).

Protect your septic system!

1. Inspect your system every 2 to 3 years and pump as recommended.
2. Use water efficiently.
   - *Fill the bathtub with only as much water as you need.*
   - *Turn off faucets while shaving or brushing your teeth.*
   - *Run the dishwasher and clothes washer only when they're full.*
   - *Use toilets to flush waste only (not kitty litter, diapers or other trash).*
   - *Make sure all faucets are completely turned off when not in use.*
   - *Maintain your plumbing to eliminate leaks.*
   - *Install aerators in the faucets in your kitchen and bathroom.*
   - *Replace old dishwashers, toilets and clothes washers with new, high-efficiency models.*
3. Don't dispose of household hazardous wastes in sinks or toilets.
4. Care for your drain field. Avoid driving or parking vehicles on your drain field. Plant only grass over and near your drain field to avoid damage from roots.

Southwest Florida
Water Management District
WATERMATTERS.ORG • 1-800-423-1476
VISCDR-PT/05-08

Preventing Septic System Problems



You should know that:

- As a homeowner *you're responsible* for maintaining your septic system.
- Maintaining your septic system *protects your investment* in your home.
- You should have your septic system *inspected every 2 to 3 years* and pumped as recommended.

If properly designed, constructed and maintained, your septic system can provide long-term, effective treatment of household wastewater. If your septic system isn't maintained, you might need to replace it, costing you thousands of dollars. A malfunctioning system can contaminate ground water that might be a source of drinking water. And if you sell your home, your septic system must be in good working order.

Why should I maintain my septic system?

Septic systems are often taken for granted because they are out of sight and out of mind. Proper operation and maintenance of your septic system can save you money, protect your family's health and protect your watershed.

Save money

Failing septic systems are expensive to repair or replace, and poor maintenance is often the cause. Having your septic system inspected regularly (at least every 2 to 3 years) is a bargain when you consider the cost of replacing the entire system. Your system will need pumping (generally every 3 to 5 years), depending on how many people live in the house and the size of the system. An unusable septic system or one in disrepair will lower your property value and could pose a legal liability.

Protect health

When septic systems fail, household wastewater is released into the environment and can contaminate nearby wells, ground water and drinking water sources. Bacteria is a typical pollutant in household wastewater and can cause communicable diseases through direct or indirect body contact or ingestion of contaminated water or shellfish.

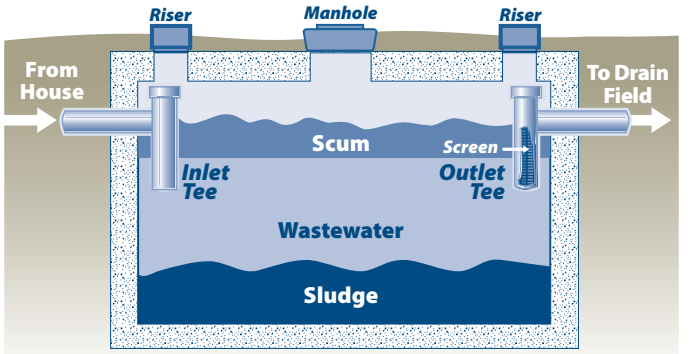
Protect the watershed

A watershed is an area of land that water flows across as it moves toward a common body of water, such as a stream, river, lake or coast. Everyone lives in a watershed and our actions affect the health of the watershed. Because a septic system uses the environment to treat wastewater, it may release untreated or partially treated wastewater if the system fails. This inadequately treated wastewater contains nutrients such as nitrates and phosphates that can degrade lakes, streams and shorelines and contaminate our drinking water supplies.

How does a septic system work?

Microbes in the soil digest, or remove, most contaminants from wastewater before it eventually reaches ground water. A typical septic system has four main components: a pipe from the home, a septic tank, a drain field and the soil.

The septic tank (see illustration below) is a buried, watertight container typically made of concrete, fiberglass or polyethylene. It holds the wastewater long enough to allow solids to settle out (forming sludge) and oil and grease to float to the surface (as scum). It also allows partial decomposition of the solid materials. Compartments and a T-shaped outlet in the septic tank prevent the sludge and scum from leaving the tank and traveling into the drain-field area. Screens are also recommended to keep solids from entering the drain field. The wastewater exits the septic tank and is discharged into the drain field for further treatment by the soil.



Septic Tank

How do I maintain my septic system?

Inspect regularly

You should have a typical septic system inspected at least every 2 to 3 years by a professional and your tank pumped as recommended. Alternative systems with electrical float switches, pumps or mechanical components need to be inspected more often.

Use water efficiently

Average indoor water use in the typical single-family home in west-central Florida is approximately 60 gallons per person per day. Dripping faucets can waste up to 30 gallons of water per day. Leaky toilets can waste as much as 200 gallons each day. The more water a household conserves, the less water enters the septic system.

Flush responsibly

Dental floss, feminine hygiene products, condoms, diapers, cotton swabs, cigarette butts, coffee grounds, cat litter, paper towels and other kitchen and bathroom items can clog and potentially damage septic system components. Flushing household chemicals, gasoline, oil, pesticides, antifreeze and paint can stress or destroy the biological treatment taking place in the system or might contaminate surface waters and ground water.