

What Causes Septic System Failure?

The most common cause of septic system failure is improper maintenance and care.

Failure to periodically pump the tank and fix leaks, as well as adding inappropriate chemicals to the system, can degrade your septic system.

Improper design, construction or placement of the septic system in an unsuitable location can also lead to its failure.



These items should NEVER be flushed down the drain or toilet:

- Hair combings
- Coffee grounds
- Dental floss
- Disposable diapers
- Tampons
- Cigarette butts
- Condoms
- Gauze bandages
- Paper towels
- Fat, grease or oil

And NEVER flush chemicals that could contaminate the surface and groundwater, such as:

- Paints
- Varnishes
- Thinners
- Waste oils
- Solutions
- Pesticides

If you have any information regarding this or any discharge of pollutants

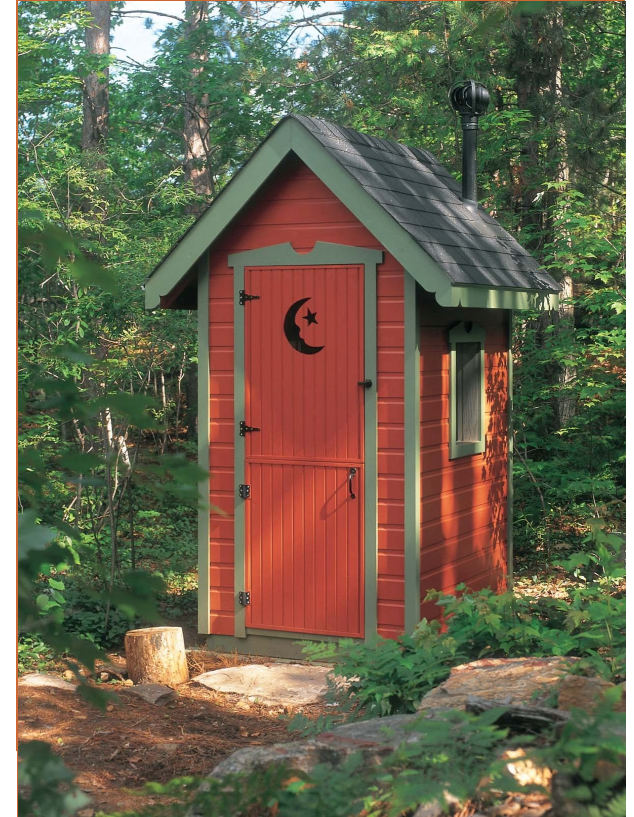
please call: (803) 642-1535

WHEN IT RAINS IT DRAINS



Aiken County Department of Engineering
Stormwater Division
1930 University Parkway
Suite 3300
Aiken, SC 29801
(803) 642-1535
www.aikencountysc.gov/stormwater

Your Septic System



STEPS HOMEOWNERS CAN
TAKE TO MAINTAIN THEIR
SEPTIC SYSTEM
AND HELP PROTECT
LOCAL WATER QUALITY



Water bodies can be polluted by many different sources, such as industrial toxic waste, gasoline and oil spills, and sewer overflows. Most people are not aware, however, that the home site has the potential to be a source of pollution that can severely degrade the water quality of lakes, streams or groundwater. Many homes use an onsite septic system to dispose of wastewater from toilets, sinks, tubs and floor drains. Failing or poorly managed home septic systems are a potential source of pollution, posing serious health risks and environmental hazards.

What is a Septic System?

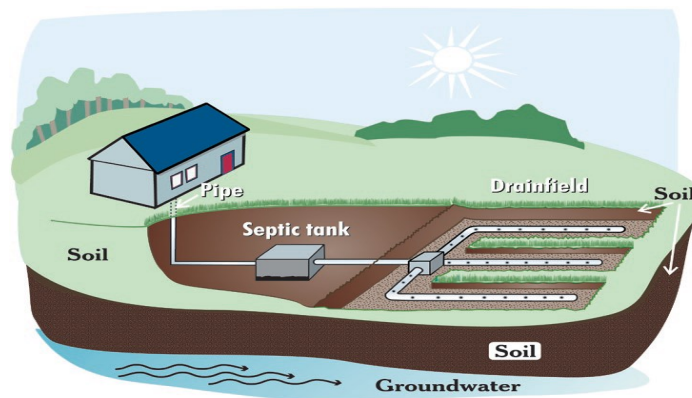
A septic system is designed to collect, treat and release wastewater. First, wastewater from the house flows into the septic tank where settling occurs: heavier solids sink to the bottom and the lighter solids (like grease or soap scum) float to the top. The liquid layer in the middle is released from the septic tank through perforated pipes into the ground. The area where the liquid is released into the ground is called a drain field or leach field.

Why do I need to maintain my Septic System?

An improperly functioning or failing system poses significant risks to human health and the water quality of nearby rivers, lakes and groundwater. Failing septic systems allow untreated human waste, its associated nutrients and pathogens, such as disease-causing bacteria/viruses, to enter the environment.

In addition, a poorly functioning septic system can release excess nitrogen and phosphorus into water bodies, resulting in aquatic weed growth which limits recreational use of ponds and lakes.

Too much nitrogen can also cause massive algae blooms. After the algae dies, it uses oxygen as it decomposes, leaving the water body in a state of hypoxia, a condition in which there is less oxygen available for fish and other aquatic organisms.



How to Maintain Your System

If you own a septic system, it is important that it be properly maintained to extend its life and prevent contamination of ground and surface water. It is recommended that you have your septic tank inspected and pumped out as needed every three to five years.

How often you need to pump the solids out of the septic tank depends on three major factors:

- The number of people in your household.
- The amount of wastewater generated (based on the number of people in the household and the amount of water used).
- The volume of solids in the wastewater (ie. Using a garbage disposal will increase the amount of solids).

Although your septic tank absorption field generally does not require maintenance, you should adhere to the following rules to prolong its functional life:

Do not drive over the absorption field with cars, trucks or heavy equipment.

Do not cover the absorption field with a hard surface, such as concrete or asphalt. Grass is the best cover because it will help prevent erosion and help remove excess water.

Do divert surface runoff water from roofs, patios, driveways and other areas away from the absorption field.