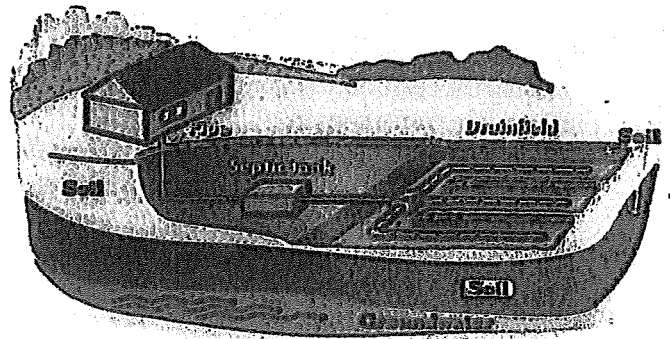


# A Guide to Your Septic System

In areas where public sewer is not available, homeowners must install septic systems on their property to treat and dispose of their wastewater.

As the homeowner, you are responsible for the care and maintenance of your septic system. If properly designed, constructed and maintained, your septic system can provide long-term effective treatment of household wastewater.



A septic system is made up of four components:

- 1 Pipe From House** – This carries all solid and liquid wastes from bathrooms, the kitchen and laundry directly to the septic tank.
- 2 Septic Tank** – This is a buried watertight container that connects to the pipe at one end and the drainfield at the other. A two-chamber tank allows heavy solids to settle to the bottom and scum to float to the top.
- 3 Drainfield** – This collects the liquid wastes (effluent) from the septic tank through a network of perforated pipes laid in gravel-filled trenches in the soil. The size and type of drainfield depends on the estimated daily water usage, number of persons in the household, and soil conditions.
- 4 Soil** – Microbes in the soil provide the final treatment by removing harmful bacteria. The effluent percolates downward and outward eventually reaching groundwater.

## Protect Your Septic System

Your septic system has a limited life expectancy which can be drastically shortened by improper use and care. Management is the key to a lasting system. Remember these four simple steps.

- 1 Pump Your Septic Tank**  
One of the most important things you can do for your system is to have the tank pumped every 3 – 5 years by a licensed pumper.
- 2 Use Water Efficiently**  
Using more water than the soil can absorb is the most common reason for system failure. Efficient water use can improve the operation of your septic system and reduce the risk of failure. Be sure to install low-flow fixtures, repair leaky faucets, and run the dishwasher and clothes washer only when full.
- 3 Watch What Goes Down the Drain**  
Your septic system is not a trash can! Never pour grease or oils down your drains; garbage disposals cause rapid overload of the system; and dispose of non-biodegradable items in the trash.
- 4 Care For Your Drainfield**  
Your drainfield is an important part of your septic system. Never plant trees or gardens, or drive or park on the drainfield. Direct water from down spouts and the sump pump away from the drainfield.

# Septic System Do's and Don'ts

1. **DO** pump your septic tank once every 3 to 5 years.
2. **DO** use water efficiently to avoid overloading the system. Be sure to repair leaky faucets or toilets and use high-efficiency fixtures.
3. **DO** keep the soil over your system slightly mounded to help surface water run off.
4. **DO** landscape properly. Dense grass cover and shallow-rooted plants are beneficial to a drainfield. Tree and shrub roots will cause damage.
5. **DO** keep all automobiles, livestock, and cement off the drainfield.
6. **DO** learn the location of your septic system and mark the boundaries of your drainfield as a reminder.
7. **DO** keep records of repairs, pumpings, inspections, and permits issued.
8. **DO** check with the Health Department before using additives. Commercial septic tank additives do not eliminate the need for periodic pumping and can harm your system.
9. **DO** recycle household hazardous waste by contacting the St. Clair County Environmental Services Department at (810) 989-6981.

1. **DON'T** use chemicals to clean your system except on the advice of the Health Dept.
2. **DON'T** use a kitchen garbage disposal unit which can add large quantities of solids, requiring the need for more frequent pumping.
3. **DON'T** put toxic household wastes down the drain like grease, oils, paints, chemicals, pesticides & vehicle fluids.
4. **DON'T** drive or park vehicles on any part of your septic system. This can compact the soil in your drainfield and damage the pipes.
5. **DON'T** stockpile snow or soil on your drainfield.
6. **DON'T** allow downspouts to drain onto your drainfield.
7. **DON'T** empty water from swimming pools, hot tubs, or sump pumps to your drainfield.
8. **DON'T** treat your system like a garbage can by disposing of dental floss, cotton swabs, cigarette butts, and paper towels.

## Warning Signs of a Failing System

- ⊗ Surfacing sewage, odors, wet spots, or lush vegetation in the drainfield
- ⊗ Plumbing back-ups
- ⊗ Slow-draining fixtures
- ⊗ Gurgling sounds in the plumbing system

## When Your Septic System Fails

- ⊗ **DO NOT** wait for a system to fail before pumping the septic tank. Once it fails, pumping the tank will not solve the problem.
- ⊗ **DO NOT** place more soil over a saturated drainfield. This is not a fix and sewage will soon surface again.
- ⊗ **DO NOT** pipe the sewage to a road ditch, drain or other waterbody. This is illegal and creates a health hazard.
- ★ **DO** contact the St. Clair County Health Department if you have questions regarding your existing or proposed septic system and the Sanitarian assigned to your area will be able to assist you.

**Not in My  
Septic System!**

**X Cloggers**  
diapers, cat litter, cigarette filters, coffee grounds, grease, feminine hygiene products, etc.

**X Killers**  
household chemicals, gasoline, oil, pesticides, antifreeze, paint, etc.



Environmental Health Division  
3415 28<sup>th</sup> Street, Port Huron, MI 48060

Hours: Mon: 8am - 6:30pm, Tues-Fri: 8am - 4:30pm

Web: [www.scchealth.co](http://www.scchealth.co)

Phone: (810) 987-5306

24-hour anonymous tip line: (877) 504-SWIM