



Environmental Health Review Services

Monterey County Health Department, Environmental Health Bureau

1270 Natividad Road, Salinas, CA 93906
(831) 755-4505 www.mtyhd.org

SEPTIC SYSTEMS for FOOD FACILITIES

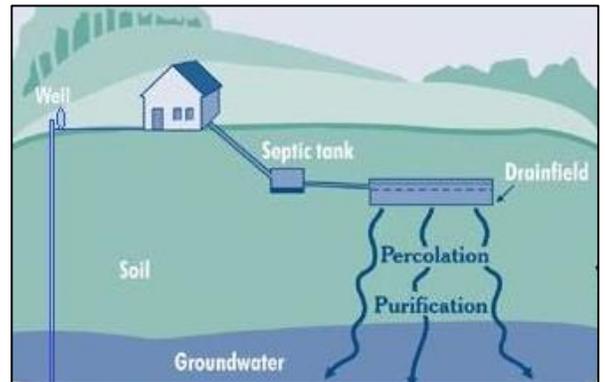
FAQs & MAINTENANCE FACTS

This is a brief overview of septic systems and what is needed for them to work for a long time. For more information, please contact our office or our website.

What is a Septic System? Also known as an Onsite Wastewater Treatment System (“OWTS”), a septic system is a plumbing system that treats wastewater (sewage) on site with the help of tanks, pipes and soil. It usually consists of a septic tank and a leach field.

What is a Failing Septic System?

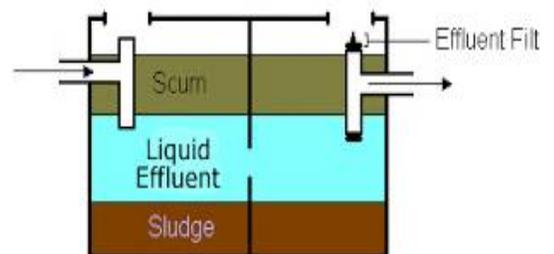
A failing septic system is one that is no longer working. Some signs of failure: plumbing backs up, the plumbing is slow, or there is pooling sewage on the ground. Sometimes the system is no longer protecting the groundwater and water well analyses are poor. Make sure your facility has a policy and procedure in place for proper septic system use, and what to do if there is a failure; all employees should understand the importance of the function of a septic system.



CAUTION: As a food facility, when your septic system is not working, your facility is required to close, as it poses a public health hazard. For the health of your patrons, your septic system and your business, learning how your septic system functions and how to use, monitor, and maintain it properly is very important.

What does a Septic Tank do?

Septic tanks are watertight tanks that collect solids and separate your wastewater into layers of floating scum, sinking sludge, and a middle layer of “clear” liquid effluent that goes to the soil for further treatment. Sanitary T’s are important to separate out the layers, and collect from the “clear” middle layer. Anaerobic bacterial activity happens in the tank to treat the sewage and reduce some of the solid volume. However, tanks need to be pumped periodically to keep the solids and larger particles out of the leach field and the soils; the use of the system will determine how often the tank should be pumped. Washing machines, dishwashers, and garbage disposals will increase the amount of sludge, and the tank will require more frequent pumping.



Effluent filters, inserted into the outlet sanitary T, also help to keep solids out of the leach fields and the soils. They need to be cleaned once or twice a year: open both septic tank lids, remove/slide out the filter, hose the filter off over the inlet side of the tank, re-insert the filter into the outlet/effluent sanitary T, and secure both septic tank lids.



Safety Fact:



A SEPTIC TANK!

BE AWARE: All septic tank lids should be secure at all times, and tanks maintained in good condition.

Entering into a septic tank (purposefully or accidentally) is likely to be fatal because of dangerous gases and/or risk from drowning.

Watch out for unsecured or damaged septic tanks and/or septic tank lids. Immediately repair or replace damaged tanks and/or lids using a licensed septic contractor under an approved permit.

What does a Leach Field do?

Effluent from the septic tank flows by gravity or is pumped to a leach field for further treatment. Leach field operation is affected by the soil percolation rates, which includes aerobic bacterial activity and physical filtration through the soils. The wastewater generally percolates downward through soil and eventually enters a groundwater aquifer. A standard leach field consists of a series of perforated distribution pipes placed in two-to-three foot wide trenches. The perforated pipe is placed on top of gravel which is also used to backfill around the pipe. The gravel promotes drainage and provides a surface area for necessary bacterial activity. The trenches are covered with soil to prevent contact with the wastewater and reduce infiltration from rain, and to promote additional aerobic activity and/or possible transpiration.

SEPTIC SYSTEM MAINTENANCE:

Septic tanks and leach fields are a viable wastewater (sewage) treatment system if properly designed, constructed, and maintained. Maintenance of the septic system primarily consists of removing the accumulated sludge on a periodic basis.

In addition, users of a septic system must observe the following basic rules in order to ensure satisfactory operation:

DO...



- ✓ Have your septic tank pumped periodically by a Yolo County registered septage hauler.
- ✓ Minimize or eliminate the use of garbage disposals/grinders. This appliance adds extra solids to the system.
- ✓ Install equipment that is approved by this department and your septic system operator/designer. For example, a high-temperature dishwasher could affect how the septic tank operates because the wastewater will be hot and could agitate the layers in the tank.
- ✓ Design your septic system properly based on the site evaluation report proposed by a qualified septic professional and your expected use.
- ✓ Expand or change of your menu, occupancy, or any other factors that could alter your original wastewater load without approval by the Environmental Health Bureau to verify that your system is designed appropriately to handle additional load or change of use.
- ✓ Have an approved, adequately sized grease interceptor or grease trap installed prior to the septic tank to keep grease out of your septic system. This grease interceptor or grease trap should also be pumped regularly and maintained in a sanitary manner.

DO NOT...



- Flush semi- or non-biodegradable items into the tank, including paper towels, sanitary napkins, tampons, newspapers, writing paper, rags, disposable diapers, or cat litter. Do not put grease into your septic system; restaurants should have a properly sized grease interceptor to filter out grease/fats before the septic tank.
- Flush large amounts of chlorine bleach or lye products into the tank; however, normal use may not harm the bacteria.
- Pour oil or grease into the tank.
- Connect roof drains or other landscaping drains to your septic system. Extra water will flood the tank and leach field. Divert drainage away from the leach field area.
- Add sodium hydroxide or potassium hydroxide to the tank. These chemicals will affect the settling of solids and cause the sludge to flow into the leach field.
- Plant trees or plants known to have invasive roots near a septic system. Roots will clog the pipelines or damage tanks.
- Drive vehicles or place heavy objects over septic tanks and leach fields or over the required leach field replacement/repair area.

