

Your Septic System



A Reference Guide for Homeowners

Santa Barbara County
PUBLIC Health
DEPARTMENT

Santa Barbara County Environmental Health Services

Our job is to help ensure that existing and future on-site sewage disposal systems are constructed, modified, repaired, abandoned, maintained and serviced in a manner which **protects the health, safety and general welfare of the people of Santa Barbara County.**

North County:

2125 S. Centerpointe Parkway #333
Santa Maria, CA 93455-1340
(805) 346-8460

South County:

225 Camino del Remedio
Santa Barbara, CA 93110
(805) 681-4900

What Environmental Health Services can provide for you:

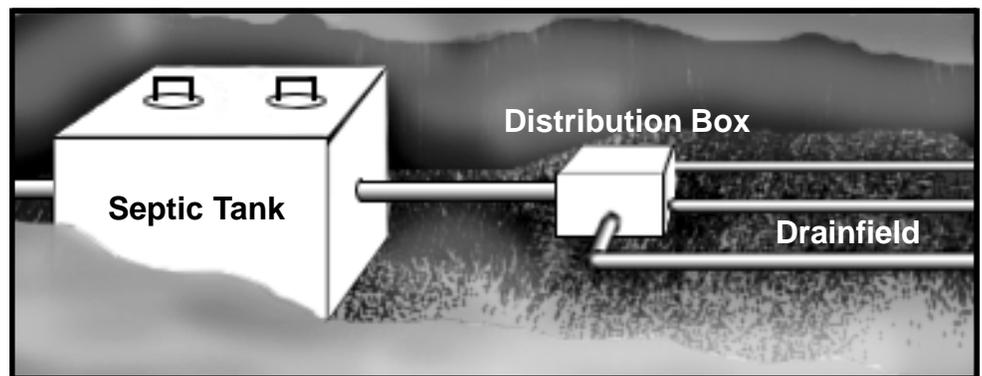
- Lists of qualified septic tank pumpers
- Lists of septic system contractors
- Printed information about septic system maintenance
- Available recent history of your property

How Your Septic System Works

Septic systems are individual wastewater treatment systems.

Septic systems use a buried settling tank and the soil to treat small wastewater flows, usually from individual homes. They are typically used in rural or large lot settings where centralized wastewater treatment is impractical.

All septic systems are individually designed for each site, but are based on the same principles.



A typical septic system consists of a septic tank, a distribution box and a drainfield, all connected by pipes.

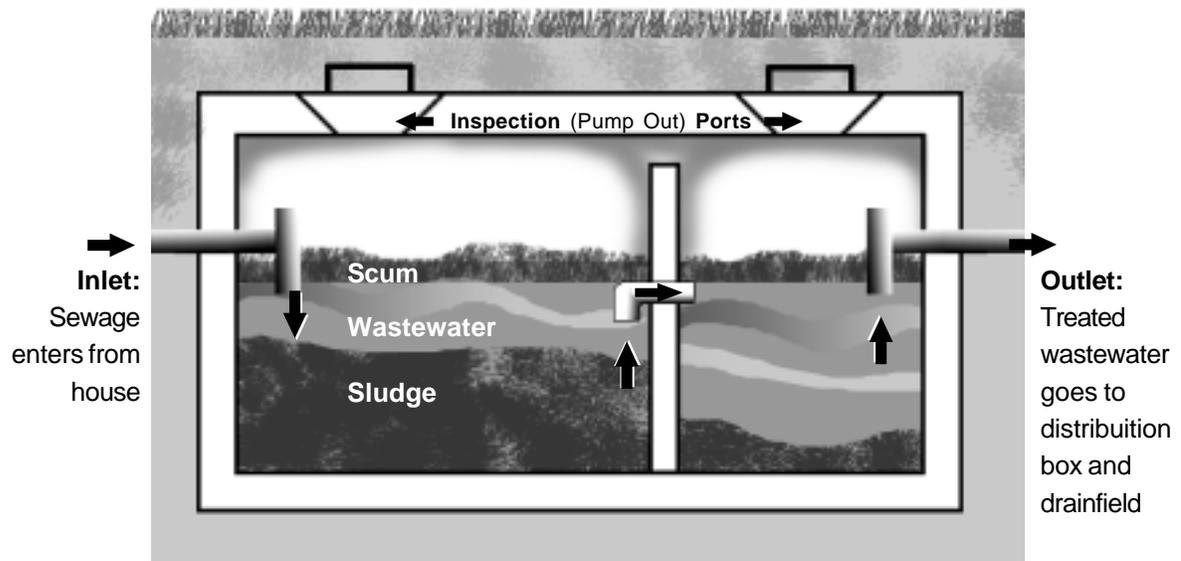
Your septic system treats your household wastewater by temporarily holding it in the septic tank where heavy solids and lighter scum are allowed to separate from the wastewater. This separation process is known as *primary treatment*.

The solids stored in the tank are partially decomposed by bacteria and later removed, along with the lighter scum, by a professional septic tank pumper. Failure to pump out accumulated solids and scum will eventually result in clogging of the drainfield and failure of the system.

When the partially treated wastewater leaves the tank, it typically flows into a distribution box that divides the flow among a network of drainfield trenches. Drainage holes in each line allow the wastewater to be absorbed into the soil. The wastewater then slowly seeps into the subsurface soil where it is further treated and purified (*secondary treatment*).

A properly located and functioning septic system does not pollute the groundwater.

Inside a Typical Septic Tank



Septic systems must be maintained regularly to work properly. Solids and scum that accumulate in the septic tank should be pumped out every three to five years to protect the leachfield from clogging. Neglect or abuse of your septic system can cause it to fail.

Failing septic systems can:

- cause a serious health threat to your family and neighbors;
- reduce the value of your property;
- be very expensive to repair;
- degrade the environment, especially lakes, streams, and groundwater;
- put at risk those whose water supply comes from that groundwater.

Be alert to the warning signs of a failing system:

- sewage surfacing over the drainfield (especially after storms);
- sewage back-ups in the house;
- lush, green growth over the drainfield;
- slow draining toilets or drains;
- sewage odors.

Do's and Don'ts

- Do** have your tank inspected every 3 to 5 years by a licensed septic tank pumper. If you have a garbage disposal unit, pump the tank at more frequent intervals.
- Do** keep a record of pumping, inspections, and other maintenance. Use the back page of this brochure to record maintenance dates.
- Do** practice water conservation. Repair dripping faucets and leaking toilets, run washing machines and dishwashers only when full, avoid long showers, and use water saving features in faucets, showerheads and toilets.
- Do** learn the location of your septic tank and drainfield. Keep a sketch of it handy for service visits. If your system has a flow diversion valve, learn its location and turn it once a year. Alternating drainfields can add many years to the life of your system.
- Do** divert roof drains and surface water from driveways and hillsides away from the septic system. Keep sump pumps and house drains away from the septic system as well.
- Do** use bleach and disinfectants sparingly. Bleach, disinfectants, and drain and toilet bowl cleaners can kill bacteria that are essential to the operation of the septic system.

Don't allow anyone to drive or park over any part of the system. The area over the drainfield should be left undisturbed with only a mowed grass cover. Roots from nearby trees or shrubs may clog and damage your drain lines. Paving over a drainfield will reduce its efficiency and is prohibited.

Don't make repairs to your septic system without obtaining the required health department permit. Always use professional licensed septic system contractors for maintenance and repairs.

Don't use commercial septic tank additives or caustic drain chemicals. These products may hurt your system in the long run.

Don't use your toilet as a trash can by dumping nondegradables down your toilet or drains. Also, don't poison your septic system and the groundwater by pouring harmful chemicals down the drain. They can kill the beneficial bacteria that treat your wastewater. Keep the following materials out of your septic systems:



Remember to always dispose of wastewater from your home into the septic tank. This includes all sink, bath, shower, toilet, washing machine and dishwasher wastewaters.

Any of these waters can contain disease-causing microorganisms or environmental pollutants.

For More Information

Please contact your nearest Santa Barbara County Environmental Health Services office:

Santa Barbara (805) 681-4900

Santa Maria (805) 346-8460

Record of Service		
Date	Work Done	Contractor