



Septic System Reference Guide

Wastewater

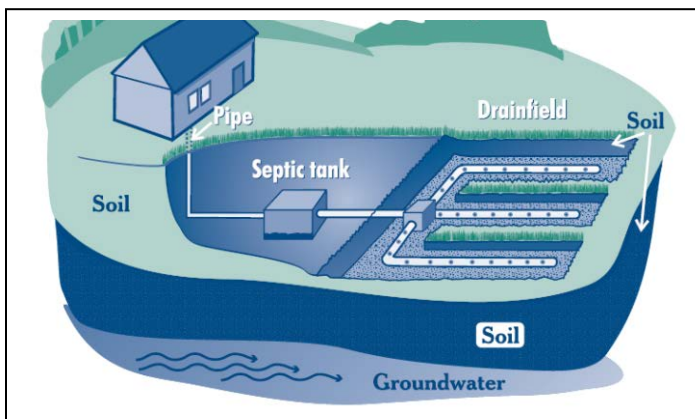
Your Septic System

Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS) are used in residential areas where public or community sewer is not available. The most common OWTS consists of a septic tank and an absorption field or trench. To obtain proper, satisfactory service from your septic system, it is important to know the basics about its function, design, operation, and maintenance.

How It Works

Wastewater from sinks, showers, toilets and washing machines flows into a concrete, plastic, or fiberglass septic tank. The purpose of the septic tank is to separate the solids from the liquids; the solids settle to the bottom of the tank to form sludge or float to the top of the tank to form scum. The tank contains two compartments and an inlet and outlet baffle to prevent solids from entering the absorptions field. Bacteria present in the tank break down and reduce the volume of solids in the tank. The solids that remain

must be pumped out periodically.



The liquid wastewater flows from the septic tank to an absorption field or trench for treatment and disposal. Wastewater is distributed underground in the field or trench through perforated plastic pipes which are surrounded by gravel. The gravel supports the pipes and stores the wastewater until it

percolates through the underlying soil. In some systems without gravel, subsurface plastic chambers store the wastewater until it percolates into the soil. The soil acts like a filter to remove pollutants from the wastewater before it recharges the groundwater.

Some areas and soils are unsuitable for conventional systems due to high bedrock, high ground water or poor soils. A Boulder County Public Health environmental health specialist can suggest alternative systems.

Check. Permit. Update. Approve.

Why Systems Fail

Septic systems fail because the wastewater is unable to percolate into the soil. This can happen when wastewater is overloaded, or when the soils become clogged with solids.

Failing septic systems can:

- Increase the likelihood that neighbors and those living in the home may become ill from bacteria
- Degrade the environment by contaminating groundwater or surface water
- Contaminate water supplies and put private water supply users at risk for illness
- Decrease property values

Early warning signs of a failing septic system include:

- Increased or unusual surface moisture over absorption area
- Slow draining toilets or drains
- Sewage backups in the house
- Sewage odors
- High liquid level in septic tank

Maintenance Record:

Date	Work Performed and Comments	Contractor	Cost

Check. Permit. Update. Approve.