

What You Can Do To

EXTEND THE LIFE OF YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM

Managing your septic system

Having regular maintenance inspections and pump-outs of your septic system will keep it working efficiently and can prevent costly repairs. However, there are also *daily precautions that you can take* to help your septic system function properly.



To flush or not to flush — Aside from wastewater, toilet paper is the only other thing that should be flushed. Using the toilet to dispose of items such as sanitary products, paper towels, disposable diapers, cigarette butts, and even tissues will harm your septic tank and cause you to need pump-outs more often.



Don't put food down your sink. Septic systems are not intended to dispose of food waste, coffee grounds, grease, or fat, and, in fact, they will harm the septic tank. Try using a compost pile for non-meat food waste; it will help you avoid paying for unnecessary septic system repairs!



Don't use a kitchen garbage disposal. Having a garbage disposal doesn't make food waste, grease, or fat any easier for your system to handle. If you do use a garbage disposal, it's especially important that you have a larger than normal tank, that it has an effluent screen, and that you pump out more frequently.

Don't rinse toxic materials down your sink or toilet. Pouring disinfectants, large amounts of bleach, drain clearing products, oils, and other chemicals down your sink, bathtub, or toilet will damage your septic system. Even rinsing paintbrushes in the sink or toilet allows enough paint to travel to your tank that the tank's function can be impaired.



Reduce your water usage. Water conservation protects your septic system because it reduces the load of wastewater your system has to handle. It also will save you money on water bills, and with a little practice, it's easy to do:

- Repair leaky faucets and toilets.
- Install low-flow water fixtures.
- Turn off the water while brushing your teeth or shaving.



Balance your water usage throughout the week. When your septic system receives large volumes of water within a short period of time, it can cause solids to move into the drainfield, resulting in a clog. Don't do all your laundry at one time; spread the chore out over the week.

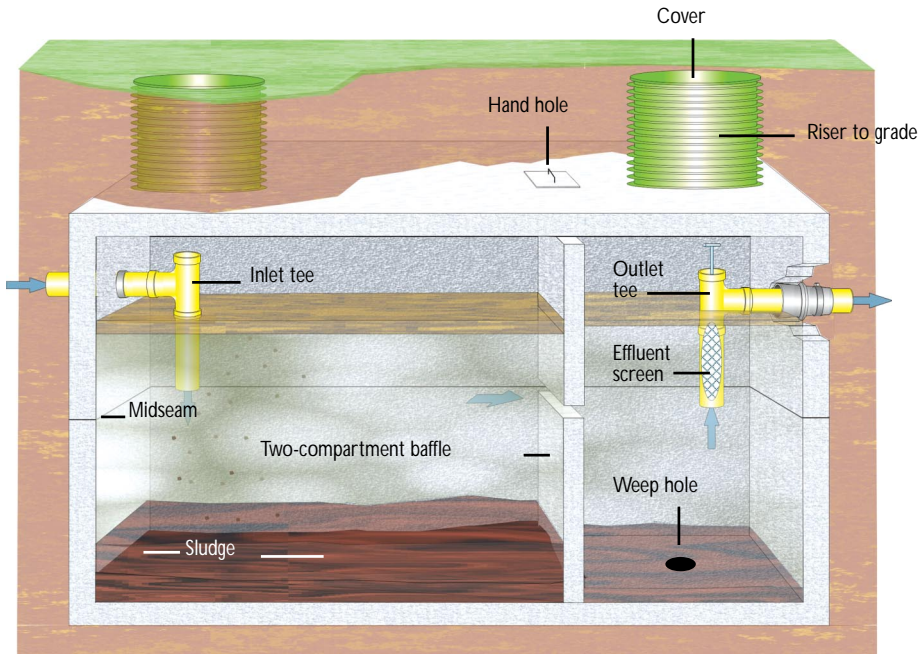


Diagram of a two-compartment septic tank with access risers and an effluent screen.

Additional Information Is Available

This series also includes fact sheets about first maintenance inspections, routine maintenance, and pump-outs. Additional information is available at: www.uri.edu/ce/wq or call the URI Onsite Wastewater Training Center at 401-874-5950.

Septic System Checkup: The Rhode Island Handbook for Inspection. RI Department of Environmental Management. Available at www.state.RI.us/dem. Additional information is available at: www.uri.edu/ce/wq/owtc/html/owtc.html



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