

You would certainly never think of connecting the plumbing that carries wastewater from your house to the plumbing that carries fresh water to your drinking water tap. That could be what you are doing. Improperly sited, over-loaded or poorly maintained POWTS (Privately Owned Wastewater Treatment System) can add nutrients, bacteria, viruses and hazardous chemicals to groundwater. Those pollutants can then be drawn into your well and come out the tap in your drinking, cooking and bathing water.

Even if you don't pollute your own or your neighbor's drinking water, improperly functioning POWTS can add pollutants to lakes and streams increasing weed and algae growth and, in extreme cases, killing fish.

These problems can be avoided if POWTS is:

- correctly sited
- properly designed
- carefully installed
- correctly used
- regularly maintained

Regular maintenance costs much less than repair or replacement of a failed system.

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## Maintaining Your POWTS (Septic System)



## POWTS Maintenance

The most critical aspects of POWTS management is the decision you make about what to put down the drain as noted later under "Household Hints."

### The Septic Tank

The tank is the part of the system that requires regular maintenance. You must have the tank cleaned out regularly so that sludge and scum don't build up. If you do not clean your tank when needed, sludge or scum will clog the outlet pipe or move out into the soil absorption field. This will clog the field and lead to a premature, costly failure of the system.

How do you know when your septic tank needs to be pumped? It depends on the size of your household, the volume of water you use, whether you use a garbage disposal and the capacity of the tank. Typically, most tanks are serviced every three years. Systems are required by law to be inspected or pumped on a three year interval. Most counties send out reminder cards notifying you that it is time to service your system.

Measuring the sludge and scum on your own can be difficult. It is recommended that you contact a septage servicing operator, POWTS maintainer or plumber to do it for you.

**NOTE: Gasses generated in a septic tank are dangerous and can kill!!! Never enter a septic tank. Only properly trained persons should ever enter a septic tank.**

### The Septic Tank Filter

Inside most septic tanks or pump chamber (nearly all since 07/00) is an effluent filter. The filter is designed to keep solids and other particles larger than 1/8 inch from escaping

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the septic tank and entering your drainfield.

Periodic servicing of the filter is required to maintain the effectiveness of the filter and assure proper operation of the system. Most filters must be serviced at least annually. Others, more frequently depending on manufacturers requirements and household use. Filters should be checked more often when first starting a new system to determine an appropriate service frequency.

### The Drainfield

The area where the septic tank liquid infiltrates the ground may be called the soil absorption field, seepage cell, mound, dry well or more commonly, the drainfield. When properly installed and used, it will treat and disperse septic tank wastewater for many years. The soil absorption field requires little maintenance and should last many years if a few simple precautions are followed:

1. Minimize your water use and limit peak flows (i.e. do laundry over several days instead of one).
2. Keep up on maintenance. Never allow sludge or scum to escape from the tank.
3. Some systems are equipped with a pump or dosing chamber. Make sure that all pumps or siphons are operating properly.
4. Avoid compacting the soil in and around your drainfield. Keep buildings, vehicles & other heavy equipment, and animals off the absorption field.
5. Avoid overloading the absorption field with rainfall and snowmelt. Direct surface water away from system. Make sure the downspouts carry water away from the drainfield.

## Household Hints

To minimize maintenance costs, protect your lake and groundwater and prolong the life of your system:

### **DO**

Limit the water entering your tank. Use water saving fixtures. Fix toilet float valves, leaks and dripping faucets. Spread clothes washing over the entire week.

Pump or inspect the tank at least every three years (more often if you use a garbage disposal) or as indicated by your servicer.

Divert surface water drainage away from the absorption field.

Maintain good records. Ask the previous owner for the name of their servicer and their maintenance records. Ask county for servicing records and plan file.

Have the system evaluated by a professional.

### **DON'T**

Do not connect sump pump, water softener or other discharges to the septic tank.

Do not put materials down drains that will clog the septic tank (fats, grease, coffee grounds, paper towels, sanitary napkins, diapers, cigarette butts, etc.)

Do not put toxic substances in drains that will end up in the groundwater (medications, oil, paint, disinfectants, pesticides, etc.)

Do not use additives to clean or "sweeten" your system. They may interfere with the biological action in the tank, clog the drainfield or add toxic chemicals to the groundwater.

Plant water seeking plants near your drainfield.